







"Oh! Oh!" she screamed. "It's terrible! Down here—in the cellar——!"

(Frontispiece)

(THE MYSTERY OF JOCKEY HOLLOW)

*The Arden Blake Mystery Series*

# MYSTERY OF JOCKEY HOLLOW

*By*  
CLEO F. GARIS



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*The Arden Blake Mystery Series*

BY CLEO F. GARIS

THE ORCHARD SECRET

MYSTERY OF JOCKEY HOLLOW

MISSING AT MARSHLANDS

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Mystery of Jockey Hollow

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## CHAPTER I Fleeing in Alarm

THE proud old house rang with excitement. Nor was there any attempt to suppress it. When no one but the three girls, the faithful Moselle, and her daughter Althea were in it, there seemed no reason to go all the way up to Sim's room when a lusty shout up the stairs would answer the same purpose. So Terry Landry stood with one foot on the bottom step, leaned against the banister, and again tried to make Sim hear her above the blatant music coming from the radio in the library where Arden Blake was supposed to be listening, but Arden, instead, was curled up in a big chair reading a book of ghost stories.

"Oh, Arden! Will you please turn off that radio just a moment while I call Sim?" Terry spoke in those evenly spaced, overly quiet tones sometimes effectively used to prevent one's temper from taking flight.

"Hu—u—um!" came from the library as the radio was switched off. "What's the trouble?"



"No trouble at all. Only I've shouted three times for Sim to come down and get this letter. But she must be asleep or something."

"Letter? Let's see!" Arden reluctantly closed the book she had been reading, uncurled herself from the depths of the chair, and came out in the hall to Terry, who said:

"It just came, and it's postmarked New York. Look at the size of the envelope. I wish Sim would answer!" Terry repeated peevishly.

"Of course, you could go up, you know," Arden suggested with a superior air.

Terry did not answer but tapped her foot impatiently, bringing into play a shining black patent-leather opera pump that was vaguely reflected in the polished floor beneath. Terry wore lovely shoes.

Arden took the letter and was examining it, front and back, feminine fashion. A leading jurist once said that if a woman was given a letter or any piece of paper she would, without fail, turn it over and look on the other side. Arden, however, was rewarded, for on the reverse, in large red letters, was the name "Rita Keene."

"It's from Dot's mother," exclaimed Arden. "I suppose it says Dot can't come. But I should think

she'd be glad to have her daughter visit such lovely girls as we are." Premeditated sarcasm here.

"Are we lovely girls?" inquired a voice from the stair landing above. "Seems to me I heard a little shouting."

"Sim! Where were you? I've been shouting for ages!" Terry announced.

"I know. I was phoning. I just called Ellery's. I thought we could go for a ride through Jockey Hollow. It's such a nice day, and we have the marketing done and everything." Sim, a rather small light-haired girl, already dressed in riding clothes, was descending the stairs as she spoke.

"Open this letter first. It's addressed to you. From Dot's mother." Terry handed over the missive as Arden made this demand on Sim.

"You could have opened it," suggested Sim, carefully inserting a tiny shell-pink nail under the flap, in no hurry at all.

"It says," she began, "'My dear Miss Westover: I shall be most happy to have Dorothy spend the Christmas holidays with you. I am rehearsing in a new play and would have very little time to give her. I know you will enjoy yourselves. Cordially, Rita Keene.' That's all. Oh, no, it isn't, either. It says, also, that

Dot will get here tomorrow on the eleven o'clock train. We'll meet her," Sim concluded.

"Will you ask her, in due time, of course, to take her turn at doing the marketing?" Terry wanted to know.

"A good thought," murmured Arden.

While Sim's parents were spending Christmas in the South, Arden, Terry, and Sim had been entrusted with the running of the big town house. Arden and Terry were Sim's guests over the holidays until it should be time to return to Cedar Ridge College, where they were freshmen. A last-moment idea had been to invite Dot Keene, also a freshman, to make one of the house party. Now, it appeared, Dot was coming.

Although Arden and Terry had their own fine homes in Pentville, not far removed from the Westover residence, they thought it much more fun to come and live with Sim and help her manage over the Christmas vacation. Like all girls, they were sure they could do it if once given the chance. So when Mr. and Mrs. Westover decided to go South, and when it was impracticable, because of the projected length of their stay, to take Sim with them, they agreed to let the three girls try housekeeping.

Moselle and her daughter Althea were there, of course, and would remain to do the housework. Moselle had been in service with the Westover family ever since Sim's baby days, and Althea, blacker, if possible, than her mother, was learning the ways of a parlormaid and waitress. Henry, husband of Moselle, was driving Sim's parents South in the big car. A small roadster had been left for Sim's use.

"I don't know," spoke Sim in response to the suggestion of Terry and its seconding by Arden, "I think I'll have to wait until we are a little better acquainted with Dot before suggesting marketing to her. I wouldn't like to embarrass her so soon. Which reminds me—what did you order for lunch, Terry?"

"Lamb chops, baked potatoes, peas, salad, and some of Moselle's special lemon meringue pie," Terry answered practically, licking her lips in appetizing anticipation.

"Good!" exclaimed Arden and Sim in unison. And it was good.

"Did you make a date to ride today, or did I imagine it?" Arden next asked, getting back to the original subject.

"I nearly forgot. Yes, I did. For half-past ten. You two hurry and change while I get the car out." Sim



was already starting out of the front door, while her companions, murmuring about Sim's habit of letting things go until almost the last minute, dashed up the stairs to the bright pleasant room they shared in Sim's home.

It did not take them long to get into riding clothes; warm woollen underwear (for the weather was cold), heavy gloves, and hats pulled well down. Terry and Arden wore light tan trousers with darker coats, while Sim sported a dark green coat with cocoa-colored trousers. Looking "snappy" was the main idea.

Soon the three were sitting in the little roadster, Sim's last year's Christmas present. They soon covered the short distance to the Ellery Riding School.

The girls rode so frequently, every opportunity they had to be away from Cedar Ridge, that their favorite horses were ready for them when they arrived. Dick Howe, the young groom and helper around the stable, opened the door of the car.

"Good-morning," he greeted them pleasantly and with a smile that displayed to advantage his white even teeth against the background of well tanned cheeks. "Nice day for a ride. How long do you want to stay out?"

"About two hours. What do you say, girls?" Sim asked. "Is that all right?"

"Fine," answered Arden. "But couldn't we go a new way for a change?"

"Yes, let's go by Sycamore Hall," suggested Terry.

"Sycamore Hall?" questioned Dick.

"Why not? We have time, and I like the hill there. It's so nice for a canter," Terry went on.

"Certainly. Whatever you say," Dick agreed, with just a shade of reluctance, it would seem.

Their horses were led out, and Dick gave each of the girls a "leg up." Stirrups were adjusted, and away they cantered.

Dick was a very proper young groom. He gave them a little trotting, some walking, and just enough cantering. A good horseman, he sagely observed, never allowed his animal to get overheated, but saw to it that there was the proper amount of exercise for himself and his beast.

Walking the horses, they reached the end of the paved highway and were soon upon the dirt road that wound around through a stretch of woodland into Jockey Hollow, a Revolutionary historic section just outside Pentville, which, though it was so compara-

tively near, had seldom been visited by Sim and her two chums. It was a lovely wooded place, containing, now and then, a cleared field. With Jockey Hollow in prospect, a pleasant ride was assured the little party, and, though they did not know it, the girls were to begin a strange adventure.

Now well out into the open, the horses suddenly, of their own accord, broke into a trot with Sim and Terry in the lead. Arden followed with Dick. The day was cool for December, and the horses seemed to feel frisky. They liked it.

"Don't let him get going too fast, Miss Westover," called the groom as he watched Sim. "We take that left turn."

Sim pulled her horse up, and Terry also stopped. They looked back at Arden and Dick to make sure of the direction to take next. Dick smiled and pointed to a lane leading down a hill. Sim and Terry went that way but more slowly.

"This is a new way," Arden said. "Do you know that road?"

Dick smiled slyly as he said, "I ought to. I live down there."

"In Sycamore Hall?" Arden was surprised.

"No, not in the Hall, but in a little house near it.

With my grandmother and sister. The Hall is soon going to be torn down to make way for a new road through this section. Jockey Hollow is going to be made into a national park on account of it being connected in many ways with the Revolution."

"Oh, it is?" asked Arden, interested. This was news. But the truth of the matter was that though she and her chums knew, in a vague way, about Jockey Hollow, they had been, of late, so wrapped up in college life at Cedar Ridge, they had lost track of local matters.

Arden, suddenly occupied with guiding her horse, which evinced a desire to shy, did not pursue the subject with Dick. Through the trees she now caught a glimpse of the two-hundred-year-old mansion known as Sycamore Hall. There were many stories about it, one or two concerned with the more or less established fact that it still contained certain objects supposed to belong to the descendants of the original owners, whoever they were. No one now lived in the Hall, nor had it housed anyone for some time. In spite of its age, the old mansion, though woefully lacking paint, was well preserved. It was as strong and sturdy as some ancient oak tree.

Sim and Terry, in the lead, had approached Syc-



more Hall and were waiting for Arden and Dick to reach them. The two girls gazed, not without interest, at the deserted mansion. There were evidences about it of some new and strange life. There were dump carts, but no horses, some piles of boards, and, near the drive, an old flivver that seemed impossible of being used.

From within the ancient mansion came dull blows, as of pounding, and out of some open windows floated a fine dust, like smoke.

"Is the place on fire?" asked Arden as she and Dick spurred their horses forward.

"No. But I guess they've already started to tear it down. A new road is going right through the old place." Dick seemed to sigh a little.

"What a shame," murmured Arden. "It's too bad such a historic place can't be preserved."

"I guess it's too old to preserve," Dick said. "Though they are going to make a park of the Hollow and save some of the smaller houses that were used by Washington or Mad Anthony Wayne or some of the Revolutionary folks."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Arden. "I wonder——"

But she never finished that sentence. Just at that moment something happened.

Two big Negroes, one carrying a crowbar and the other an ax, came fairly leaping out of the open front door of Sycamore Hall. They were mouthing something unintelligible and seemed to be rushing straight for Sim and Terry.

"Oh! Oh!" gasped Arden. "Oh, Dick, what is this?"

Straight for Sim ran the two Negroes, their ragged clothes white with plaster dust. They were still mumbling and waving their hands in a terrified way. This was too much for the nervous horse on which Sim was mounted. He reared sharply, nearly throwing the girl off, though she had a good seat, and then, wheeling, the beast ran wildly up the road past Sycamore Hall.

Terry managed to control her animal, though he too showed a desire to bolt.

"Oh, Dick!" cried Arden again.

"I'll get her!" shouted the young groom, and spurring his mount he dashed away after Sim. Left to themselves, Arden and Terry looked at each other with frightened eyes. The two colored men ran into the woods across from the Hall, still mumbling in a

strange way and showing every evidence of terrible fright.

"Come on, Terry, we've got to follow!" called Arden.

They urged their steeds after those of Sim and Dick. When they reached the top of the hill they could see that Sim was safe. Dick had dismounted and was holding her still frightened animal. Sim was soothing the creature with neck-patting and calming words.

"Heavens, Sim! What happened?" gasped Arden.

"Those men scared Teddy, rushing at him that way, though why, I don't know. I wonder what the idea was, having them dash out in that wild way? If I had been standing a little nearer they would have run right into Teddy and me! They couldn't seem to turn off. They were wild with fright. But why?" Sim was a little indignant.

Dick smiled up at her. "Haven't you heard?" he asked.

"Heard what?"

The other girls listened with interest.

"Why, this old place is said to have become suddenly haunted. Something in Sycamore Hall has stirred up the spirits of the departed owners, and more than

once the Negroes and Italians hired to tear it down have been scared away—frightened stiff. A lot have quit. I understand the contractor has continually to get new men. And it looked as if those two who ran out saw something—or thought they did," Dick concluded. "They probably won't come back."

"Haunted!" murmured Terry.

"Ghosts—Revolutionary ghosts," whispered Sim.

"How thrilling!" exclaimed Arden. "Tell us some more, Dick."

"Well——" began the groom, but he got no further.

Back up the hill came running the same two Negroes who had but a few minutes before rushed out of the mansion in such a terrified way. Their faces still bore signs of their fright.



## CHAPTER II

### The Ghost Mansion

UNABLE to understand what had caused the workmen to act as they had, and sensing the possibility of a further fright to the horses, Arden and her chums were about to wheel and ride away. But Dick called to them:

"Steady; I think it will be all right. These men don't know what they're doing. They are just frightened."

"At what?" asked Arden.

"That's what I'm going to try to discover," said the young groom. Then, shouting to the running Negroes, he inquired:

"What's the matter?"

"Don't ask us, boss," answered one, dubiously shaking his head. "We sho' am finished on dat job! I never could abide t' wuk in haunted houses!"

"Dat goes fo' me, too!" echoed the other. "I don't laik ghosts!"

Then they both ran on, disappearing into the woods.

"Ghosts!" laughed Terry after a moment of silence. "They're just what we need to brighten up our lives."

"Let's go in the old mansion and look around," proposed Arden.

"Have we time?" suggested Sim.

They glanced at Dick for his verdict.

"We have about half an hour," he said, looking at his watch. "Go on in if you want to."

When they urged their horses through the overgrown tangle that had once been a front yard and came to a stop near the big broad porch, the pillars of which were tilting, Dick helped the three girls to dismount. Then, leading the horses to a tree with conveniently low branches, he looped the reins so the animals would not stray. Horses in the East are not trained like their Western cousins, to stand if the reins are left to dangle on the ground.

The girls held back a little before going up the four steps at the entrance of the house. It was a combination Georgian-Colonial style, squarely built, with a beautiful fanlight still intact over the center door.

"It is spooky, isn't it?" asked Sim with a pleased little shiver.

"Did you ever see such a sorrowful house, though?" Arden wanted to know.

"What do you mean, sorrowful? To me it seems very proud and stern," Terry decided.

"I don't think so. Look at the way the door hangs on its hinges. Ready to fall off if it had a good push. And what lovely hinges they are, too. Hand forged, I'll bet," Arden said, going a little closer to inspect.

Sim, quickly sympathetic, fell under the spell of Arden's imagining. "Poor old place," she murmured, "I don't blame it for haunting the workmen. I suppose this house has been the scene of many an exciting adventure. Do you know anything about it, Dick?" Sim turned to the boy, who stood aside waiting for them to enter.

He hesitated a moment before replying and then seemed reluctant to give much information.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I know a little bit about it. You see this place once belonged to my ancestors." He looked down at his polished boots and appeared rather bashful.

"Really?" asked Sim. "Tell us, please," and she smiled disarmingly at him.

Arden and Terry waited hopefully for Dick to continue.

"Suppose we go in and I'll show you the place," the young groom suggested.

"How about the ghosts?" Terry asked.

"These ghosts aren't the common graveyard variety—that is, if the stories are true. They all seem to be spirits of soldiers, farmers, and sometimes there's the ghost of a lovely girl," Dick went on. "You see this place was built during the Revolution. The Continental army 'dug in' at Jockey Hollow, here, for the winter of 1779."

Terry, growing bolder, preceded the others into the hall. Rooms very much dilapidated were on either side. One room, probably a parlor, was dominated by an enormous fireplace with a faded picture above it.

"Oh, girls, come here!" Terry called. "Look at this! Is this your girl ghost, Dick?"

They hurried to Terry as she stood before the painting. Terry was in sharp contrast to the charming scene above. Feet planted a little apart, hands clasped behind her back, tall as she was, her head just came to the old, high mantel. The girl in the picture was also in riding clothes, but far different from Terry's. They looked like a tableau: "The Past and Present."

Terry wore smart riding trousers and a flaring coat. Her sandy hair was just showing beneath a well blocked hat.

The girl in the picture was dark-haired and tall.



Her right arm was thrust through the reins of a black horse. The panniers of her dark-green riding costume seemed to melt into the leafy background of the painting.

The picture girl was staring straight at Terry and perhaps it was not entirely imagination that disclosed something akin in the two girls.

"What a charming picture you make!" Arden remarked, and then, as she saw that Terry was perhaps too delighted at the compliment, she added: "In this dim light we can't see the freckles."

Terry turned and, like a small boy, stuck a pink tongue out at Arden.

Dick, in the meanwhile, was looking thoughtfully at the girls. Sim went to him.

"Dick," she said softly, "I can see that you somehow belong here. Won't you tell us about it? We've been riding with you several seasons now, and we won't repeat a thing if you don't want us to."

"Please," begged Arden. "You look as sad as this house, Dick. What's the matter?"

"This place," Dick began with an including gesture, "once belonged in my grandmother's family. But the deed, or some necessary paper, has been lost, and now the state claims the estate, and the old house is to be

torn down to make way for a road. The march of progress, you know, must not be halted."

"But has it no historic interest?" Terry asked. "Couldn't it be preserved as a shrine of some sort? I mean the house, for you said Jockey Hollow is going to be a park."

"I'm afraid not," continued Dick. "I guess it's about the only mansion that George Washington never visited. Besides, the original house has been added to so many times that now it is a combination of three or four periods."

"What would your grandmother do with this property if she could find the deed?" asked Terry practically.

"Sell it," answered Dick without any hesitation. "At least it would bring enough money for me to give up this stable job that any half-wit could hold and let me finish at college. Then Betty, she's my sister, could go to New York and keep on with her work in costume design and interior decoration. She's really talented," he added earnestly.

"If this home were mine I should hate to part with it," Arden announced. "I don't see how your grandmother can bear to give it up. Isn't there a chance that she could keep it, Dick?"

"Perhaps, if we could prove title. But even then we need the money its sale would bring. Granny ought to have little comforts, though really she's been swell about it all. Never complains. And the stories she knows!"

"What does she say about the ghosts?" Sim asked.

"Just laughs. She says she'd sleep here on All Souls' Eve or any other particularly ghostly time. I guess she likes ghosts."

"I'd love to meet her sometime. Do you think we might? I wish we could help some way," said Arden thoughtfully.

"I'll ask her. I'm sure she would. She leads rather a lonely life," Dick answered. "And she loves young folks."

"Say, Dick, who is this girl in the picture? Isn't it too valuable a painting to be left here?" Terry was studying the painting.

"It's not worth much. It was probably painted by one of those traveling artists who could do family portraits or barns, whichever might be wanted. Granny has left a few things in here to sort of claim the place, though the claim isn't recognized. And we

live now in a little house behind this one. It used to be the servants' quarters," Dick finished bitterly.

The little group fell silent. The girls had stumbled, it seemed, upon something very private, and they felt embarrassed at learning of someone's misfortune.

"Like finding somebody crying when they thought they were alone," Terry later remarked.

No one knew what to say. Dick walked to a window that reached almost from the ceiling to the floor, and stood looking out. Terry, always the first to move, stepped over the fender around the fireplace and peered up the chimney. For no reason except to break the trying silence, as far as she knew.

Barely perceptible at first, gradually a sound impressed itself on the girls. Like footsteps on a stair, far away but coming nearer, the sound approached.

Terry pulled back her head from the dark corner of the fireplace and looked at her friends. They stood like statues staring back at each other, while Dick turned slowly from the window.

"What's that?" Sim asked, cocking her head like a young puppy as if to hear better.

"Sounds like someone creeping down the stairs," Arden ventured.

"Perhaps it's one of the workmen coming back," suggested Terry.

At this Dick shook his head. "No," he said. "I happen to know that those two men we saw a while ago were the only ones on the job today, and they left in a hurry," he finished, grinning.

"Well, then, there is only one explanation left." Arden was glowing with excitement. "Ghosts!"

"Oh, gosh!" exclaimed Sim. "Let's go! I like to read about ghosts but I don't like to meet 'em. Come on!" Without waiting for the others, Sim ran from the room.

"Wait, Sim, wait!" Terry called. And when Sim did not return Terry added: "Arden, we'll have to go too! I don't like it, either." Then she turned traitor to the cause and ran after Sim.

There was nothing left, then, for Arden and Dick to do but follow. But Arden lingered a moment in the hall on her way out and listened.

The measured sound above was slowly coming closer. Heavy steps, as though the feet making the noise were encased in thick boots.

"Thud! Thud! Thud!"

Above the first landing all was in darkness, and even Arden, ghost-loving as she was, decided to wait no

longer to find out what might be coming down the long stairs.

With a last fearful look she also fled, calling to Dick for protection and stumbling over a loose floor board in her haste.



### CHAPTER III

#### Arden Wonders

COMMUNING with herself, Arden Blake, as she dashed out of the strange old mansion, was wondering just what it was all about and what, exactly, had happened.

Dick, anxious about the horses and doubtless believing there was no danger to Arden, who had been left to be the last out of the house, did not pause as she called to him.

"She'll be in the open in another second," reflected the young groom.

As she hastened out Arden had many conflicting thoughts.

"Another mystery," she told herself, half whispering. "Can there be ghosts? If ever there was a place made for them, Sycamore Hall is. But ghosts in the daytime! Perhaps those men did it to annoy us for coming around while they are working. But what object could they have in doing that? Oh, if it's another

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mystery, I hope it turns out as well as the one in the orchard did."

At last she was away from the strange big house, and she fairly jumped down the broad steps. With a sigh of relief she saw the girls and Dick.

Outside, the horses were straining at their bridles. With ears laid back and eyes frightened, every now and then one gave a nervous little tap on the hard ground with dainty fore feet.

Sim tried to mount Teddy unassisted, but every time she put her foot in the stirrup the frisky animal wheeled about, leaving her hopping helplessly. At last Dick had to hold him while Sim climbed up. Then helping up Arden and Terry, Dick mounted his own horse with practised ease, and they turned away from the ghost house.

So nervous were the animals that the girls did little talking. They were occupied in keeping them under control. Dick cautioned them about letting the horses bolt. Headed to the stables as they were, once they got going it would be difficult to stop them, and a dash across the heavy traffic streets of Pentville would be dangerous.

Arden did manage, when her horse stttled down a bit and danced along beside Dick's for a stretch, to

ask him what had gotten into their usually well behaved mounts.

"They're frightened at something," he answered. "They were scared stiff when we came out."

"So were we all," Arden admitted. "Do you suppose the horses could feel our fright?"

"Some people claim that a horse feels his rider's every mood," Dick answered. "I really don't know. But I surely believe these horses sensed something, perhaps more than we did. But——" Then Dick's shining black mare broke into a sudden trot, and he could not finish what he started to say.

But Arden was persistent. She urged her steed forward and was again riding beside the groom while Terry and Sim pranced on ahead.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Dick?"

He hesitated a moment and then slowly answered:

"I believe that people often see just what they expect to see in haunted houses, so called, and hear just what they want to hear."

Arden was plainly disappointed at this matter-of-factness on Dick's part. She had hoped for something more concrete than this. But remembering Dick's, or, rather, his grandmother's, connection with Sycamore Hall, she did not press her point.

"Let's catch up to the others," she proposed, and Dick assenting, they were soon close behind Terry and Sim, who were still talking soothingly to their mounts to quiet the restless animals. After a ride of several miles through woodland they reached a straight open stretch of road and broke into a smart canter. The girls were a little breathless when they dismounted at the stables.

"Do you young ladies want to make another date for the end of the week?" asked Titus Ellery, owner of the riding academy, as he came forward on much-bowed legs. He was not an attractive man, but he knew horses. Rather stingy and grasping was his reputation. "How about it?" He was respectful enough but persistent.

Sim spoke up.

"Not just now. We'll phone." Telling Dick to "charge it," she and the girls walked toward the waiting roadster.

Dick opened the door.

"Don't let this adventure scare you," he said in a low voice. "It was probably nothing but those excited men imagining something." He seemed worried lest they cancel further riding engagements during the holidays, and Dick probably made a little commission.

"Don't worry," Terry answered. "We loved it! See you later; and thanks, Dick!"

They were off, Sim driving with a little less than her usual abandon. Arden was the first to notice it.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Scared?"

"No, just thinking."

"It was queer," murmured Terry. "I was really frightened."

"The men were, anyhow," said Arden. "And when we heard those bumping sounds coming out of an old uninhabited house——" She shivered a little.

"Probably falling plaster!" laughed Sim.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Arden.

"She's thinking of what happened in the orchard," remarked Terry.

"Well, something happened there all right," Arden responded.

"Let's forget it a while," proposed Sim, and she stepped on the gas in her usual manner.

Home again, they were greeted at the door by the smiling Moselle who answered their ring.

"You-all have a nice ride?" she asked cheerfully.

"Grand," answered Terry. "And we met up with some very fine ghosts, Moselle."

"*Ghosts?*" Moselle's eyes were wide.

"Over by Sycamore Hall," Terry continued.

"Um—uumm!" Moselle shook her head. "I don't know what your mother will say, Miss Sim. Chasing after ghosts. You-all ought to keep away from that place. I know it's dangerous. Plumb full of ha'nts, that what it is."

"Why, Moselle! Do you know anything about it?" Sim asked, surprised.

"Yes'm, Miss Sim, I sure does! Only las' night Brutus Jackson tole me he was going to work there 'cause he needed a little change, and ain't half hour ago he came dashing into my kitchen with Sam Brown and tell me they done quit."

"He did—why?" Arden frantically signaled Sim to let her continue the questioning of Moselle.

"Why, he say," went on the colored woman, "a funny old soldier with a bloody bandage around his haid come clumping down the stairs and stood pointing for Sam and him to get out the door and, yes, ma'am, he say they sure did git!" Moselle made unbelieving noises.

Terry turned to Sim. "Gosh, I'm sorry we didn't stay. What'd you run for, Sim?"

Sim started to reply, but seeing Moselle listening intently said casually, "Oh, I just felt like it." Then, addressing the curious cook, she asked: "How about lunch, Moselle?"

"Yes'm, Miss Sim, in just a few minutes. You-all got time to change if you like," she said, quick to realize she was being dismissed.

"Good! Come on then, kids, let's go up"; and before Arden or Terry could ask any more questions Sim, taking them by the elbows, steered them up the stairs.

By unspoken consent they gathered in Sim's room.

"Gee, Arden, I was afraid Moselle would get all worked up, and then you know what she'd do? Write to Mother and Dad and get them all excited. She doesn't miss a thing. And she's very superstitious."

"I forgot about her," Terry admitted pulling a turtle-necked sweater over her head. "Wounded soldier! I guess that's what we heard. Certainly sounded like footsteps to me. Don't you love it? What did Dick say, Arden?"

"Not much," Arden answered. "We were too busy with the horses. Did you notice how scared they were?"

"Say," interrupted Sim happily, "won't Dot love

this! Bet she won't want to sit around and play contract now."

"Oh, contract—who wants to do that? There's something queer about that place, and I'm going to find out what it is before I have to go back to school," announced Arden emphatically.

"We're with you, Arden! You can't leave us out of any such excitement as that," Terry decided. "Can she, Sim?"

"I should say not!" Sim said, and striking a dramatic pose sang out: "All for one, one for all! Arden, Terry, and Sim!"

"And Dorothy," supplemented Arden. "She'll be here tomorrow. Let's take her out to see the house in the afternoon."

"Yes," agreed Sim. "That will be fun, and maybe we'll see the soldier."

At this point in their plans the dulcet tones of the luncheon bell could be heard coming from below, and Terry was obliged to slip her sweater on again. In the end they all ate in riding clothes and talked of subjects far from their minds lest Althea, who was serving, should carry ghost stories back to her mother in the kitchen.

The lamb chops were done to a turn, and the peas



were startling in their lovely greenness. The pie, lemon meringue, was a fluffy dainty that disappeared with remarkable quickness when put before the girls.

Everything in its place was their motto; ghosts belonged to Jockey Hollow, and food came under Moselle's supervision. After a half year of college fare, food was, after all, important.

Arden Blake, Terry Landry, and Sim Westover had been schoolmates and chums ever since they started in Vincent Prep. They were graduated at the same time and went to Cedar Ridge College for their freshman year together. The first term of the college had just ended and they were home for the Christmas holidays.

As told in the first volume of this Arden Blake mystery series, entitled *The Orchard Secret*, almost as soon as the three freshmen signed in at Cedar Ridge things began happening. There was something strange about the college orchard, where so many gnarled, weird, black trees stretched up their waving branches in the night. And when Arden saw the poster of the missing and rich Henry Pangborn, there was another complication.

But Arden and her two chums solved the puzzle,

much to the benefit of the college swimming pool, which had had to be abandoned because there was no money to repair it. And thus Sim remained at college, for she was determined to become an expert swimmer and diver, and when she had found the swimming pool was so sadly out of commission, she had threatened to leave. But Arden's success in solving the mystery had made everything all right.

When the three girls had finished lunch in Sim's beautiful home on the outskirts of Pentville, a few miles from Jockey Hollow, Arden went to the library across the hall and began to scan the shelves impatiently.

"Know anything about these books, Sim?" she asked.

"Yes, of course I do. What do you want to know?"

"I want to find out something about our Revolution. Perhaps we can get a volume that will tell who really lived in Sycamore Hall in Jockey Hollow."

"That's a great idea, Arden! At times you seem almost brilliant," laughed Sim.

"Well, suppose you help me to shine a bit," Arden proposed.

"Let me help," begged Terry.

They delved among the books but though they found some American history lore and much about the Revolution, there was nothing on Jockey Hollow or Sycamore Hall.

"I'll have to try somewhere else," Arden sighed.

The girls spent most of the afternoon talking over their strange adventure, at times hardly believing it had happened, again with a little thrill of fear mingled with doubt as to what it all meant.

"Well, I'm going to find out something," finally announced Arden the impetuous.

"How?" drawled Sim.

"I'm going to the library. They ought to have something there about Jockey Hollow. Goodness knows it was important enough!"

"Tell us when you come back," begged Terry.

"Don't you want to come with me?"

"No. I'm for a nap. Riding always makes me drowsy."

"I'm with you, Terry," announced Sim. "Come on."

She led the way upstairs, where she and Terry changed from riding clothes to lounging pajamas. But Arden donned a polo coat and low-heeled shoes and started out.

"Don't you want my car?" sleepily called Sim, lolling on her bed.

"No, I'm going to walk, thank you."

She was on her way, though she scarcely realized it, to the beginning of another strange mystery.

## CHAPTER IV

### Seeing the Dead

ARDEN felt sure there must be some historical books in the town library that would throw light on the legends of Jockey Hollow. By studying these legends, Arden decided, she might strike a clue to the traditions that had built up the Sycamore Hall ghost stories.

Hurrying to the library, determined to get at that angle without delay, she was disappointed when she saw a girl standing at the entrance and shaking the heavy door handle to make sure it was locked.

"That must be Dick's sister, Betty," she decided. "He said she worked in the library. But why is she closing it so early?"

Reaching the door, Arden asked about the early closing. The girl, pretty and friendly, explained that lack of funds and the holiday season made it more practical to close early. She was Betty Howe, she admitted, smiling at Arden's question. And she said

her brother Dick had mentioned the girls from the Westover house having gone riding with him.

"I'm sorry, but all the lights are out now," the girl continued. "We open at nine in the morning, you know," she smiled, putting away her keys and pulling on her gloves.

"Oh, thank you. Then I'll come back in the morning."

"Yes, do. I hope it was nothing important?"

"No, indeed," Arden answered smiling. "Tomorrow will do nicely."

But as she hurried along to Sim's she did feel disappointed.

"Did you find out anything?" Sim promptly asked, while Arden sank down rather wearily.

"No. The library was closed. But I had a nice walk," Arden tried to persuade herself as well as Sim.

"Well, let's forget the ghosts," suggested Terry. "It's been a long day, and tomorrow we'll have Dot with us."

"And so, to bed!" yawned Sim, and those who didn't yawn certainly felt like it.

Their night was undisturbed by "witches, warlocks or lang-nebbied things," in spite of what had happened, or was thought to have happened, at the Hall.

Not even a bad dream threw its shadow on the healthy girls sleeping serenely at Sim's.

Perhaps that grand feeling of being able to lie abed as long as they wished was too much for them; at any rate, when Terry breezily wished Moselle a cheery good-morning, the maid made no attempt at hiding her surprise.

"'Mornin', Miss Terry. You-all sleep well?" she inquired.

"'Morning, Moselle," Terry replied. "Yes, thank you. And now I'm ready for a big breakfast."

Moselle grinned her delight. She loved to cook, and nothing pleases a cook more than knowing her art is appreciated.

Arden and Sim were not long behind Terry, and the girls made a pretty picture in their gay dresses against the background of dark paneled walls in the dining room.

It was Arden's day to do the marketing, but because they were to drive to the station and meet Dorothy Keene, shortly after breakfast, they agreed, "just for this once," to leave the planning of the day's meals to Moselle. They were still determined to run the house efficiently and well, on a smaller budget than Sim's mother had allowed; furthermore, Terry

and Arden agreed not to telephone home for advice. Of course, the routine of cleaning and washing went on as before: the girls could not improve on that. So Moselle was instructed to call up the stores and have something very special for the coming guest, whose mother was "in the movies," which fact thrilled Moselle to the cockles of her heart.

When the train pulled into the suburban station, the three girls, with the car parked as close as possible to the platform, had no trouble in finding Dorothy. Although Terry, perched on the car top, which was folded down, had thought she could see better from that vantage point and locate her chum more quickly, Dorothy, it developed, was the only passenger who alighted at Pentville. So they saw her at once. She was wearing a smart fur coat cut on swagger lines and a ridiculously small hat pulled over one eye. She waved a greeting.

"Hello, Dot!" Sim ran to meet her. "Awfully glad you could come." They hugged affectionately. "We're having specially nice weather just for you."

"Sim dear," the girl replied, "and Terry and Arden, it's great to see you. I've been in a penthouse in New York with a lot of stage-struck people, and I feel a bit struck myself," she laughed. "This lovely country and



you kids are just what I need," declared the visitor.

They walked toward the car, each trying to show her own particular brand of pleasure at Dot's arrival.

"And we need you, too," Arden put in with a little tug at Dot's arm. "Don't we, girls?"

"Now, look here!" and Dot pulled them all to a sudden halt. "You are up to something, I'm sure. What is it? Any new mysteries thrusting themselves upon you?"

"Dot, my child," Arden answered, "you are positively psychic! That's exactly what we're bursting to tell you!"

"Ghosts! Nice hundred-year-old ones! All hoary and bloody, with pointing fingers!" Terry supplied.

"And a poor old lady and two orphan grandchildren," grunted Sim, as she tried to turn the wheel of the car. All four were in the front seat, a feat accomplished by Sim, Arden, and Terry squeezing into a row and Dot sitting on Terry's lap. That Dot's head was much higher than the windshield and unsheltered from the wind bothered them not at all. With so much to say, they simply couldn't split up the group by using the rumble seat. Dot's grips were there, anyway, and for the two weeks of her visit she would be well

supplied with clothes—at least, judging by the size of the bags.

"Go on, my dear Watsons," chuckled Dot laughing. "Isn't there a nice-looking young man any place in this mystery?"

"Of course there is," replied Terry, "and a girl, too."

"But the house, Dot—it's perfect! We heard the ghostly footsteps ourselves, and in broad daylight, too!" Sim surprisingly stated.

Dorothy shook her head. "You're all sleeping idiots! Well, I won't arouse you. I suppose country people must have some amusement."

"Country people!" Three voices sang out together. It never failed. A suggestion that they in Pentville were not as metropolitan as their New York chum was always a disputed point.

"A ghost couldn't live in New York," Arden said sarcastically. "You have to get out where there is some room for ghosts. Like Pentville or Jockey Hollow."

"Don't you believe us, Dot?" Terry asked. Dot just smiled.

"We'll show you. What do you say, girls—shall we

go over to Jockey Hollow before we go home? The bags will be safe. Our ghost isn't a thief." Sim slowed down at the junction where one road led to the Hollow, which they would pass as they went to Sim's house, though at some distance.

"Yes! Let's go, Sim. If you're not afraid of the car on those roads," Terry said, plainly anxious to go back to Sycamore Hall.

Sim needed no urging, and going into second she turned the wheel and very carefully started down the narrow dirt road. On the brow of the hill she stopped and pointed out the faded stone walls of the house which could clearly be seen through the bare trees.

"That's it, unbeliever," Sim told her guest. "We'll take you inside, if we can get in, and show you things your eyes have never before beheld."

"Lead on MacDuff," Dorothy laughed. "Whom have you hired to jump out on me and cry 'Boo'?"

"Word of honor, Dot," Arden insisted, "it isn't a joke. You'll see! Go on, Sim," she prompted.

Bouncing and rolling from side to side, the little roadster neared the house. The old lane that once approached prosperous farm lands, but was now overgrown and stony, led almost to the door. But know-

ing she must turn around again to go home, Sim stopped so they could back out.

Shutting off the motor, she turned to her friends.

"I hope he shows up," Sim whispered to Arden and Terry.

"Who?" asked Dot.

"The old soldier with a wounded head, all bandaged in bloody rags. He wears very heavy boots and was hidden and sheltered from the British in this old house during the Revolution," Terry guessed facetiously.

"But how did you find out all this?" Dot was plainly interested but also a little incredulous.

"We were riding here in Jockey Hollow yesterday," Sim explained, "when our horses were frightened, and we were, also, by some Negro workmen rushing out of the place, crying, 'Ghost!' Oh, it was startling!" and she related, in her most convincing way the details of their strange adventure.

"Oh!" said Dorothy after a little pause. "Oh!" That was all.

The four sat in the car, no one speaking for a while. Their own imaginings had gotten the best of them, evidently, though no one would admit it.

Then, suddenly, the quiet and peace surrounding

the old Hall was broken by the loud squeaking of ancient nails being pulled from hundred-year-old wood, and the shrill sounds were like the shrieks of frightened women. It startled the girls into activity.

"The workmen are back!" Arden said disappointedly. "I guess the ghost won't dare come out."

"Too bad, girls. You almost had me believing you. But let's go in and look around, anyway. I like old houses, with or without ghosts." Dot was still skeptical.

So they climbed out of the car and picked their way over the tangled vines and low bushes to the door: a dignified, paneled old piece decorated with a handsomely discolored brass knocker.

Dorothy, in a spirit of bravado, lifted the knocker up and rapped it down smartly. They waited a second and, still defiant, Dorothy put her hand on the bronze knob to open the door.

No one knew just how it happened. Dorothy said she had not yet tried to open the door when it swung back of its own motion, and instantly the dim old hallway stretched before them. At that the reassuring sound of hammering suddenly stopped and, gathering courage, the girls were about to enter when a shout—

half scream, half moan—echoed through the old mansion.

The girls stood transfixed with terror, almost breathless. Another cry quickly followed, and then the sound of loud, hurrying footsteps could be heard. There was a rush of bodies, and three men in working clothes, powdered white with plaster dust, literally jumped down the last few steps of the great staircase and continued their maddened race out of the big front door, brushing by the astonished girls without a word.

"There!" cried Sim triumphantly. "Something's happening now!"

"I should say so!" gasped Terry, looking at Dot, whose eyes showed wonder and who seemed too surprised to speak.

"Hey! Wait!" Arden shouted, and she turned to pursue the last of the three frightened men still wildly running away. "Wait! Tell us what's the matter!"

The workman, beating his hands on his trousers to knock out some of the dust, barely hesitated.

"Lady, I can't wait!" he exclaimed. "We saw the dead body of an old woman stretched out on a bed. We saw her in a room below where we were working

—saw her through a hole I tore in the floor and that went into the ceiling of her room. We saw her plain! I'm finished on this job!" He had to wait to say all that, but then turned and ran on.

"Oh, please!" begged Arden. "Just where did you see her? Tell us! Is she really dead?"

"I didn't go near her," he said breathlessly. "I don't want to get mixed up in no murder case. But she sure looked dead to me—lying flat on her back—in a red dress—or something—and pale—pale as——" He looked toward his retreating companions, now some distance down the road, and then, with a frightened glance up at the old Hall, he turned again and ran away.

"Well, what do you think of this?" demanded Sim. "Shall we go in?" She turned to Dorothy as though asking her permission.

"I—er—why, of course!" the visitor decided, perhaps a bit hesitantly. "If there's anything wrong we ought to notify the police. Yes, we must do that."

It was a bold decision. It rather pleased Arden and her chums.

## CHAPTER V

### Baffled

STILL, no one wanted to be the first to enter, and they stood on the step, frightened but intensely curious.

Arden gave Terry a little push, hinting that she should lead, but Terry sidestepped. Sim sneaked around the others until she was on the edge of the step, nearer the car.

"Do you think it could be so terrible?" she questioned.

"We ought to find out. Besides, if it's someone dead——" Dorothy stopped—"it couldn't hurt us anyway."

She started cautiously just a few steps, but at least they had begun to move. The other three, in close formation, followed. At the foot of the stairs they stopped; listened. There was not a sound. The daylight filtering in through a stained-glass window at the first landing cast eerie shadows and even made the girls' faces take on a sickish pale color.



Dorothy put her hand on the worn old stair rail and slid it up ahead of her as though to pull herself after it. A deep indentation checked the sliding hand and acted like a brake.

Then Terry, growing a little braver, deliberately went up a few steps, and in this fashion, by starting and stopping every second or two, and listening, cautiously they reached the first landing.

There they halted. But only for a second, for something drew them on; some power they could not resist urged them up almost against all reason, until they were on the second floor of the weird old house.

There the hall ran the length of the house. All furnishing was gone from the hall except an old dusty chest that stood in a dark, dingy corner.

Rooms were on either side of the passage, but the doors were all closed except one. Somehow Dorothy felt this was The Room. But to look in would be another matter. What was in there? Nothing at all or——?

They must find out. The old adage, "safety in numbers," came back to Dorothy. She motioned to the other frightened girls. They crept forward on tiptoe.

Now in line with the opened doorway, Dorothy forced herself to look in. She saw a large square room

with shuttered windows through which the morning light barely seeped in splintered blades. There was the bed.

The bed! That dreadful possibility!

How could she look? No longer brave, she shut her eyes. Her buzzing head seemed not to belong to her. But the next moment, of its own accord, it turned again to that dreadful resting place. A deep sigh, a gasp, from one of the girls behind Dorothy startled her further, and she could delay no longer. She opened her eyes.

The bed was empty!

A four-poster that must once have boasted a canopied top, the huge old bed stood stark and sinister. A dark bedraggled cloth covered the mattress, but happily—and how glad they were—nothing else was there.

"Whew!" Terry ran a trembling hand across her forehead. "I feel as if I had just gone through a clothes wringer."

"Such suspense! I lived a hundred years coming up those stairs," declared Sim. "Is my face white?"

Arden did not feel like joking. She went closer to the bed.

"Absolutely empty! Those men must have very

vivid imaginations," she declared with a little laugh. "Seeing things, that way."

"This time three men saw the same thing, or claim they did. The other time it was two who saw and who also claimed they heard the thudding of the soldier's boots. Some complications even for ghosts," Sim remarked.

"It's very queer. The spirits of the departed owners of the Hall must be rising in protest against the invasion of the wreckers," Terry suggested, not too merrily.

"Are you sure, my dear friends, you had nothing to do with this?" Dorothy asked, once more skeptical.

That question brought a storm of protest.

"Dorothy!" exclaimed Arden, "do you really think *we* could have scared away those workmen?"

"Well, if you feel that way, Dot," began Terry. But she didn't; she told them so. And once more it was a united party that looked for further evidence of ghosts, real or imaginary.

The inevitable fireplace was built in the wall not far from the suspected bed. An old squat rocker stood lonely and forlorn in the center, and a packing box had gathered dust under a window—that was all. The floor was also dusty, but Dorothy stooped down and, with

royal disregard, swept a spot clean with a dainty lace-trimmed handkerchief.

"Look at the floor, girls," she said. "See how wide the boards are and the pegs to hold them down. They don't make floors that way any more. All these boards were cut and planed and the pegs made and fitted in by hand."

"I wish I knew more about such things," Terry remarked, inspecting the floor. "All I know is that this must have been a fine old house, and I wish it wasn't going to be torn down."

"It reminds me of an impending execution," Sim sighed. "It did its duty, and now it has to give up its life for its country." That trite remark brought on a giggle, but Sim didn't mind.

Arden and Dorothy were snooping about, looking through the cracks in the shutters, and even peered under the bed.

"If they succeed in demolishing the Hall, I'm going to try and buy the picture of that girl downstairs," announced Terry. "She fascinates me! I'd like to find out more about her."

"Probably Dick's grandmother could tell you. We must look her up," said Arden, dusting her hands.

"Who's that?" she asked suddenly as voices in dispute were heard from somewhere.

"Someone downstairs," Dorothy answered. They listened. One voice, a man's, seemed just very ordinary, not the least bit ghost-like.

"Let's go down and see what's happening," Terry suggested. "We're not afraid of workmen."

They all trooped down in much different spirits than they had come up in. Now, like weather vanes turning in the wind, their interest was veering to the commotion below.

In the hallway stood the three workmen who had so recently rushed out of the old mansion. There was another, an older man, obviously their employer, with them now.

"Are you men telling me that you're quitting, too?" asked the boss sharply.

"Yes, sir," the leader of the three stated emphatically. "I don't like this place. I'd rather chop down trees all winter than go up on the top floor for a day and start tearing this place down."

"But, man, you're wrong! There's nothing there. You told me this same story last week, and when I looked in, the room was empty," the wrecking contractor declared.

The girls were on the landing above, and he turned to them, seemingly surly and surprised.

"That your car outside? What are you doing in here?" he asked brusquely.

"Yes," answered Sim. "We heard someone shout as we were going past and stopped to see—if we could help."

"Well—what did you find?" the contractor asked, apparently hoping that the statement of disinterested young ladies would impress the frightened men favorably.

"Nothing," Arden admitted. "The room was empty when we looked in. Although *he* said," Arden indicated the man she had questioned, "that there was an old lady up there, dead on the bed."

"Yeah—*he* said," the contractor shrugged. "I know! He had the same story last week. All right," he continued, now addressing the men, "go to the office and get your pay. You're finished! But this house comes down if I have to pull it down myself!"

The laborers turned away and, talking among themselves, gathered up their lunch boxes and coats and hurriedly walked away.

"You girls want to be careful in here," the contractor warned. "Not that I worry about ghosts, but

you might get hurt if something fell on you. They were working on the roof today. This is the second time men have laid down on this job. But I'll have this place leveled to the ground if I have to get my own family to help me." He looked angrily at the ceiling above him and then, taking a big black cigar from his pocket, he bit the end savagely. Glancing about once more he finally strode after the men, leaving the little group of wondering girls to puzzle it out.

## CHAPTER VI

## Introducing Granny

THE GIRLS just stood there, shocked by the wrecker's vehement manner. The door was still open, and suddenly, without warning, a face appeared there.

"Oh!" came in a surprised murmur from Arden and her chums as they huddled closer.

Then the brown, weather-beaten countenance of an old woman broke into a queer wrinkled smile. It was an old woman—not a ghost. The girls now realized this.

"Are they gone?" The voice was young and full of amusement as an old lady, wearing a dress which was neat but quaint and old-fashioned, stepped inside the hall.

"Yes, they're gone," answered Sim, the first to fall under the charm of Granny Howe, for it was she coming to investigate, apparently.

"I came up to see what the trouble was, but I didn't want to meet that Callahan man," she declared. "He's

got such a temper, always having trouble with his men." Then, as though she had just thought of it, she asked who the girls were, what they were doing there, and scarcely giving them time to answer, she told them who she was. Then, still interrupting, Granny Howe guessed they were the "young ladies who had been riding with Dick: he had told her one of them had red hair," she quaintly revealed.

Terry blushed a little at that and then smiled; it was impossible to take offense at Granny's gentle ways.

"Yes, Dick took us in here yesterday," Terry answered. "We were frightened away by——"

"Ghosts, I suppose," the old lady chuckled. "Dick told me about it." She laughed heartily. "Everybody but me seems to think this place is haunted. Nonsense!"

"But there is something queer about it, isn't there?" pressed Arden. "I'll be so disappointed if you can explain it all naturally. We have just got to be thrilled, you know."

"My dear," Granny answered, "you're just like Betty, my granddaughter. She loves to think that Nathaniel Greene or Patience Howe has come back in spirit form to defend the old place."

"Who were they?" Dorothy stepped forward. "Won't you tell us something about them? I'm studying architecture, and, even with the little I know, I can tell that Sycamore Hall must have been designed by a fine artist."

"Dick told us it would soon all be torn down," Sim supplemented. "We're awfully sorry, and we're not just curious. If there is anything we could do to help——"

Granny's blue eyes swam with tears; she shook her head and looked at each of them in turn, pathetically.

"You're dear young things. I can see that. But I'm afraid we'll have to let Sycamore Hall go." She sighed and patted the wall beside her. "My grandfather and his father before him were queer men. Never had much faith in banks. If they had, the deed or whatever claim papers we need, would not be missing today, and Betty could go on gallivanting around like you girls, instead of sitting cooped up all day in the town library. And Dick could be in college——" She left the sentence unfinished and looked away sadly.

Terry decided to change the subject. The old lady seemed so broken. It was too bad, really, that no one could help her.



"Who was the girl in the picture downstairs? I think she is lovely," Terry pointed out brightly.

"She was Patience Howe, an ancestor of mine. She lived here in Washington's time. She was a modern girl for those times: brave and strong. She kept that horse of hers right in this house when some of the Continental soldiers tried to steal it," Granny answered Terry, her head high now with a touch of ancestral pride.

"Could we—would you—" Sim faltered—"would you let us come to see you sometime—just to talk? Or would you rather not tell us things? I can understand that the present condition of this old place must make you very sad, and if you can't bear to think about it, we'll know just how you feel." Sim was trying to be diplomatic, but at the same time she hoped the old lady would answer "yes."

"Dick told us a little of your misfortune, though we had to drag it out of him," Terry added. "That was yesterday, when we heard the footsteps."

"Footsteps!" echoed Granny. "That would be Nathaniel Greene walking in his delirium from the wound in his head. Poor fellow! He loved Patience, and she nursed him a long time, but he died." The old lady was once more lost in ancient memories.

The girls didn't know how to proceed now. Sim's request was still unanswered, and they did so want to learn more. In their hearts they all wanted to help this charming lady and save Sycamore Hall. That would aid Betty and Dick also.

With a brave effort, Granny checked her dreaming, and putting a tanned old hand on Sim's arm said: "Of course you may come to see me—if your parents will let you. I'm considered somewhat of a recluse by many folk around here. But I'll be glad to have you to tea tomorrow afternoon. All of you. You'll be perfectly safe, and it will brighten things up for me. Do you know where I live?" she asked briskly.

The girls said that they did not and began thanking her and assuring her that no one would in the least object to their visit. They were all talking at once, so Granny smiled and held up a gentle restraining hand.

"You sound so alive and gay—I know what you're trying to tell me. It's all right. I'll enjoy having you. But now I must go back. We are baking today, and I stayed longer than I should have." She stood at the door as if indicating to them that they too must leave.

The girls were glad enough to walk out into the sunshine, and presently they climbed back into the

car. Granny chuckled as they squeezed in and waved "good-bye" as Sim backed away.

"There, Dot, how did that strike you?" Arden breathlessly asked when they were safely on their way. "Do you still think it's a put-up job on our part?"

"Arden, I'm sorry," answered the girl. "I'm entirely convinced, and I'm on your side. Wasn't she fascinating?"

"Just like someone out of a play," Terry exclaimed. "Isn't it a shame? Taking her own house and land away from her! If I were a ghost I'd come to her rescue, too! Even if I did have to break up a wrecking gang."

"What could those men have seen?" Sim wondered aloud. "They certainly were scared."

"When we get home we'll have to consider each person, the way detectives do, and reason out who would be likely to know, or be responsible for those manifestations," Arden suggested. "Shall we? Let's write it out—and see if we can solve the mystery systematically."

This suggestion met with whole-hearted approval, and all the rest of the way home the girls talked of the best method of "detecting." Sim stepped on the gas and bounced the girls unmercifully, she was so

anxious to get home, but they clung together and didn't complain.

They had something new to do now and could hardly wait to begin. A first-rate mystery to be unraveled, in the most up-to-date detective fashion. It would be through the method of clues and eliminations of clues, and the girls were "all for it."

## CHAPTER VII

### Trial by Jury

SIM'S LIBRARY was an ideal room for the girls to carry out their plan. Seated at a large desk, where Sim's father often worked at night, Arden assumed the rôle of judge, or lawyer, they were not quite sure which. Sim, Terry, and Dot, in varying positions of comfort, were perched around her.

Events had been too exciting to warrant "time out" for Dorothy to change from her traveling clothes, so she simply kicked off her shoes and gave Althea the keys to her bags. The unpacking would be accomplished swiftly and skillfully with everything put neatly away and any wrinkles completely ironed out.

Arden sat with pen poised and her face alight with eagerness, a dark-haired, blue-eyed Portia.

"Now we'll begin," she said. "Who was the first person to mention Sycamore Hall, and how can we connect him with the mystery?"

"I was," answered Terry. "I suggested that we ride by. I was tired of the old roads."

"Theodosia Landry, student," Arden wrote in a schoolgirl's hand, "suggested visiting spot. Of course, Terry, you knew nothing about the legend that the place was haunted?"

"I object." Sim sprang up. "That's a leading question. How do we know she didn't? Remember, we are all guilty until proven innocent."

"I'll ask it another way, then," Arden agreed. "Did you have any knowledge of ghost stories emanating from Sycamore Hall, the house in question?"

Arden was well pleased at the businesslike way in which she was conducting the investigation.

"Absolutely none, it was merely a coincidence," Terry replied and Arden penned her answer.

"Who next mentioned the house?" Arden resumed her rôle of detective.

"Richard Howe," Terry supplied. "He seemed surprised that we wanted to go there and didn't seem anxious to take us."

"Yes, and it was he who told us the house was haunted!" chimed in Sim.

Arden wrote down Dick's name and occupation and the charge against him.

"Next come the men running from the house when they frightened Sim's horse. Sim, what did they say they had seen?" Arden asked, busily writing, her head on one side and the tip of her tongue showing between her white teeth as she worked.

"Dick asked them what was the matter, and one said he wouldn't work there any longer. That he wouldn't stay where there were ghosts," Terry supplied promptly.

"What happened after that?" Arden asked. "I'm a little confused, things happened so quickly."

"I'll testify again," Terry exclaimed eagerly. "This is lots of fun. Then we went back to the house after calming our horses, and entered the living room."

"Where was Richard Howe then?" asked Dorothy from a deep armchair. "It seems to me you're losing sight of him. After all, he is the one who would want to keep the house standing."

"I don't remember whether he went in first or after we did," Terry answered, "but we were all together in the living room when we heard the noise."

"Dick said there were no workmen in the house when I suggested it might be they who were responsible for the manifestations, so apparently he knew we

were alone there," Sim said. "It does seem as though he knows more than we think."

"We will each have to report what we were doing and what we heard as we were in the house. Your story comes later in the course of events, Dot. You check up on us and ask questions when we leave anything out. Now——" Arden took a deep breath. "Sim Westover, or, rather, Bernice," she corrected herself with a little giggle, "how about you?"

"I was standing near the door of the parlor leading to the hall when I heard a bump—bump—like someone coming downstairs. I became frightened and ran out," Sim stated simply.

"Terry?" questioned the youthful inquisitor.

"I was looking at the picture of the girl over the fireplace, and Dick was looking out the window. He had his back to the room," Terry told her story.

"And I," said Arden, "was near Terry, also looking at the picture when the noise came. My recollection is that Sim ran out first, then Terry and Dick, and I last. The noise was definitely louder when we left."

"But you didn't actually see anything?" Dorothy asked practically.

"No," Arden resumed, "we only heard it. When

we got home, Moselle told us that she knew the men who had been working there and that they told her they had seen the figure. Do you suppose real detectives would consider that?"

"If we want to be very thorough we ought to look those men up and interview them," Dorothy decided. "But let's go on for the time being. Don't I come next?"

"Dorothy Keene," Arden wrote and added: "student."

"I heard from the car hammering that suddenly stopped and then a cry. The men rushed out of the house. When I went upstairs I saw nothing," she remarked.

"The next people were the men who returned and the contractor. We can almost rule them out. It's Callahan's job to tear the place down," Arden went on, pushing a stray lock of dark hair out of her eye.

"Granny Howe appeared after that," Sim added. "Let me report about her, Arden."

"Proceed," Arden said with dignity.

"She poked her head in at the door and asked what the trouble was," began Sim. "Then she came in and asked if the men had gone and laughed when we told her they had," she finished.

"That covers everyone and everything," Arden remarked putting the top on the fountain pen she had been using. "And from it all, the only conclusion we can come to is that two separate sets of workmen were frightened away by something they claim they saw or didn't see. While we only heard sounds."

"You'll have to admit, though, that it was very strange that the horses should be so frightened *before* we came out. That is, we are *reasonably* certain that we did not frighten them ourselves," Terry suggested smartly.

"There's something in that," agreed Sim, "and also don't forget the number of people who heard the same kind of noises and claim they saw the same thing at the same time."

Arden stacked the sheets of paper containing the history of "The Jockey Hollow Case," as she had called it, and suggested that they be put in a safe place so more could be added. All the girls felt that there was much more to come and hoped to get new evidence from Granny Howe when they took tea with her.

Sim took the papers, locked them in a small drawer in the desk, and took the key.

"I'll put the key on a chain and wear it around my

neck. Then it will be safe." She looked at her friends with shining eyes. It was so exciting to be in the very center of a thrilling mystery.

The girls nodded their approval and began talking brightly of all they had done and seen as though they might have forgotten something important. But on the whole they were well pleased with their work and agreed it was very clever of Arden to suggest it; one useful fact remembered from reading countless detective tales had come their way.

## CHAPTER VIII

## The Ghost of Patience

MOVE OVER, Terry, give me a look!" demanded Sim, elbowing her way nearer to the long mirror before which Terry was admiring herself.

"There's plenty of room and at least two more mirrors within easy walking distance," Terry replied. "Why we all have to congregate in here, I don't know."

"It's more fun, that's why," Arden crisply replied. "And we can talk better. Moselle can hear every word we say if we call to each other from room to room. Don't forget *she's* under suspicion too."

"As far as I can see, the only person who isn't is Dorothy Keene, daughter of Rita Keene the distinguished comédienne," Terry remarked, successfully maneuvering Sim away from the glass again. "We saw her get off the train ourselves. You're the only innocent one among us, Dot, but you don't look it in that swanky dress."

"Do you think we're dressing up too much? We wouldn't want to embarrass Granny Howe," Dorothy considered.

The girls were all in Sim's big blue-and-white bedroom, laughing and talking as they dressed. It was the afternoon following the "trial by jury." Sim had lately gone "modern," and the room showed it. The walls were a cream-white edged in dark blue; light fixtures were star shaped, and the twin beds were covered with a dark-blue satin spread with Sim's monogram in white-satin letters on the fold. It was all glorious.

Fooling around until the last possible minute, they were now making up for lost time by all hurriedly dressing in Sim's room; getting ready for the visit to Granny Howe.

After talking it over they had decided that the old lady, though she was spry and active, might better enjoy the little party if they did put on a little style and dressed up. So they were wearing soft dresses and high-heeled shoes and had put on other dainty accessories.

The day was rather dark, a slate-colored sky promising snow before night, but the balmy air contradicted the warning, and Sim, with the top of the roadster

down, urged the girls to hurry. A glance at her watch showed three-thirty, and their first call should not keep Granny waiting.

They were ready at last and piled in the car, Sim letting the clutch in so fast that the sudden start snapped their heads back and jerked the car forward as though Sim was just learning to drive. They went off in a gale of laughter but not in a cloud of dust, for the frozen ground of the driveway refused to part with any of its surface.

Sim drove as near as she could to the little white house where Hannah Howe lived. The cottage-like place was behind the more stately Sycamore Hall and to the left of the lane. The lane was a mere path just tunneled with trees.

Four small pillars, more like posts, supported the shingled roof of the low porch, and behind it were two square windows with a door in between.

The girls stood in dignified silence waiting for Granny to answer Arden's knock, but she didn't keep them long.

"Come in, my dears!" exclaimed the elderly lady like a grandmother in a fairy tale. "I'm glad to see you all looking so well and happy."

Granny herself looked well and at least temporarily



happy. She wore a long-sleeved, high-necked dress, dark-blue color with little pink flowers dotted over it. At her throat, precisely in the middle, glowed with sullen brightness the soft purple of an antique amethyst brooch. Her thick white hair accentuated the smooth tan of her skin, as she smiled a welcome.

The party trooped inside the little old house, and they were at once struck by the charm and quaintness of the little place.

With admiring "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" the visitors looked eagerly about, and Granny, pleased with their young enthusiasm, explained and pointed out the interesting features.

The fireplace, with a pot in place and hooks for holding others, was especially fascinating.

"Imagine cooking over an open fire!" exclaimed Sim, "and Moselle complains about the oven in our new gas range."

"Years ago the fireplace served a double purpose," Granny explained: "that of heat and a stove. And as someone has said, they were truly the heart of the home. Many a lone winter night Patience Howe sat by this one, keeping the fire alive, wondering would she ever see her father and brothers again."

On a low maple table in front of the old Colonial

davenport, Granny was putting out the "best china": thin cups and saucers with a pink wild-rose pattern. With unfeigned interest, Arden watched her dainty movements. She seemed as much a part of the place as did the pewter plates on the mantel. The little company had settled down to chat with the abruptness of old friends. After the first greetings were over, they all felt they had known this little lady all their lives. But it was Sim who first broached the subject uppermost in the minds of all.

"It was Patience who hid the wounded soldier, wasn't it?" she asked, nibbling at a tiny bread-and-butter sandwich.

"Her picture still hangs in the Hall, doesn't it?" Terry inquired, following Sim's lead.

"What a brave girl she must have been," remarked Arden, hoping Granny would take the cue and tell them about her.

Handing Dorothy a cup of tea and settling herself in a quaint high-backed rocker, the old lady nodded her head and smiled.

"I can see you are all burning with curiosity," she laughed. "Of course, I'll tell you about her, I'm very proud of her, and as you say, my dear, she was indeed very brave." Granny glanced at the girls sitting around

her, sipping their tea and patiently waiting for her story. Then she began:

"In the year when Washington's troops were retreating from New York, Patience refused to leave her home to seek shelter with relatives at Philadelphia. This was her home: the big house, I mean, of course," she explained. "This tiny place was for the servants. But Patience decided to stay and help with the work of the farm; so many of the working men had joined the troops. There was plenty of work, and it was bitter cold, too. One day, as the poor, tired army was forced to go still farther back beyond the advancing British troops, a wounded soldier was carried into the house. Nathaniel Greene, his name was, and his comrades begged Patience to take him in and keep him, for he would surely die if made to march in the bitter cold. Patience hid him in her own room, disguised herself as an old servant, and moved out here to live."

"What a—girl!" breathed Arden, as Granny paused a moment.

"Imagine waiting on a wounded soldier," followed up Terry.

"And imagine the danger she was in," concluded Sim.

Granny, gratified that the story of her famous relative should gain so much honor through her own simple telling, finally continued.

"When the British took possession of the house Patience declared the wounded man was a raving lunatic, and so she kept him out of harm's way. Until spring she hid him successfully, and by that time the soldier and the maid had fallen in love."

The girls waited while Granny shook her head sorrowfully.

"But he contracted pneumonia and died," she murmured. "Patience never married but gave herself up to her country's cause and became a nurse for wounded soldiers. That was her candle holder; she used it to light her way along a secret passage from the big house to this one."

Granny indicated a pewter candlestick on the mantel between two plates. Their eyes lingered on it lovingly. A moment later Granny went on with her story.

"I have an old letter telling about it, but when the place was remodeled the passage must have been walled up. Dick and Betty have never been able to find any trace of it. Although, I dare say, it will come to light when the house is torn down." Granny

finished her recital and sat looking straight before her, her bright eyes dimmed with tears. She sighed and attempted a little smile.

Arden's heart skipped a beat, and a lump rose in her throat.

"Oh, it's monstrous to think that dear old place should come down!" she exclaimed bitterly. "Can't something be done to save it? Is there no way of buying it in?"

"I'm afraid we couldn't keep it, even if we could save it," Granny replied. "We need the money it would bring. But as it is now, we are unable to prove title to it, and it will go and be forgotten," she sighed pathetically. "I can stay here while I live, they have allowed me that, but Dick and Betty will be left homeless when——"

She did not finish that prophecy, but they all knew what she meant, and instantly they secretly determined to help her some way; how, they did not know.

But in a flash Sim imagined herself handing the long lost deeds to Granny Howe and then becoming a heroine. The plot had magic influence on them all.

It was Dorothy who brought them back to the present. "Was it Nathaniel Greene the workmen thought they saw the other day? But it couldn't have

been Patience on the bed," she demurred. "Of course, the workmen didn't know anything about these war stories."

"There is an old tradition," Granny resumed, "that Nathaniel appears in his tattered uniform and with his head bandaged whenever the old house, or anyone in it, is in danger.

"Sometimes, so the story goes, and you may believe it or not, as you choose," Granny smiled whimsically, "the ghost of Patience Howe is seen wandering about the old house. Certainly she would have good reason to come back here now. Not that *I* believe in such things," she hurried to declare, rather unreasonably.

The girls politely agreed, but did not want to interrupt the stirring narrative. Patience Howe's story was simply fascinating.

"As for the figure on the bed, Patience died there when she was an old woman. Her horse fell, breaking his leg, and she was mortally injured. She died in her red cloak there on the old four-poster." A reverent pause followed that statement. "But we are becoming too sad. All those things are over and done with. Won't you have some more tea, my dear?" Granny quickly asked, addressing Sim.

"The story holds such strange historic interest,"

Sim replied, accepting her second cup of tea. "May we go through the Hall sometime?"

"Whenever you like," Granny consented. "But I advise you to do it soon. That Callahan will have a new batch of workmen here by the end of the week, and you won't have the house to yourselves after that. I must say he is very determined. Don't let those ghost stories frighten you—the house is really very interesting, and the door is always open . . . to you," and the hostess included them all with a bright smile and a graceful wave of her gentle hand.

It was almost dark now, and the girls, realizing this, drew themselves up with a start.

"We want to thank you for a most pleasant afternoon," said Sim smilingly. "We must be going now; Moselle will be worried to death, and look—it's beginning to snow!"

The first feather-like flakes were floating down to be lost in the brush below. Arden sprang up and impulsively kissed the old lady they had all come to love. She gave Arden a little hug in return, and asked them all to stop and see her whenever they could, declaring she had had a wonderful afternoon, herself. Then, gathering their things quickly, they left the little white house behind them. As they drove away

the merry snowflakes were making little jabs at their happy, willing faces.

"Oh, wasn't it great!" sighed Arden.

"I feel like a live history of the American Revolution," declared Sim.

"And I feel like the latest authority on military ghosts. But I hated to have the soldier die before he married Patience," sighed romantic Terry.

"We might even be able to fix that up if we get friendly enough with the ghosts," teased Arden, which seemed like a very good idea to all of them.

## CHAPTER IX

### A Warning

THE AIR was brisk now, and the countryside had taken on that hushed feeling that comes just before a snowstorm. At the moment the roads seemed quite deserted, and their little roadster hummed along with all its prideful speed and importance.

Suddenly Arden spoke. "Let me off near the library, Sim, will you?" she asked. "I'll get a cab back. I'm going to see if I can't find a book with something about Jockey Hollow. I've heard so much, I'm greedy for more."

"We can wait for you, Arden," Sim answered. "It's not so very late, and it's only beginning to snow. You might not get a cab handy."

"No, I'd rather you didn't," Arden objected. "I want to take my time. Besides, you've got the top down, and Moselle will be worried. You go along and I'll come later," she insisted, pulling her collar up closer around her neck.

Sim finally agreed and turned toward the village, where she dropped Arden at the corner nearest the library, so she wouldn't have to turn around. Sim was not yet an expert driver and often went blocks out of her way to avoid turning. Arden stood at the corner and waved goodbye as her friends continued on their way. The corner drugstore was brilliantly lighted, and the usual group of men was hanging about the entrance, leaning up against the window, talking and laughing. They were the least desirable element in the town, lazy and shiftless and, somehow, they always gathered together.

Titus Ellery was in this group, Arden noticed, as she hurried along. A thin man, unshaven and carelessly dressed, Arden gave him a glance out of the corner of her eye. His booming voice rang out on the night air, for he made no effort to control it, and Arden could not help hearing him say:

"Swears he don't know a thing about it. But there's a chance to pick up some easy money. If we can do it. Thing is to find the stuff. It's around there some place, I'll bet. That old Mrs. Howe ain't as dumb as she looks. You got the job all right, Nick?"

Arden started. Could she stop and learn some more,

or would they become suspicious and stop talking? She thought suddenly of a plan and, entering the store, bought some powder she did not need, emerging just in time to hear the man called "Nick" laugh rancorously and say: "That Callahan's got his job cut out for him. Every darky in Pentville's scared to death. I didn't have no trouble gettin' him to hire me."

"Good!" exclaimed Ellery. "Then tomorrow——"

But Arden could linger no longer and so continued reluctantly down the street to the library, although she was now anxious to get back and tell the others what she had heard. She reasoned nothing could be done that night, so she would try again to locate the books in which she hoped to find important details.

It was almost closing time when she reached the library, and the place was deserted except for a young girl putting books back on the shelves.

Arden approached her. "Are you Betty Howe?" she asked impulsively.

The girl looked at her coldly. "No, she's not here this afternoon. May I help you?" She flashed a brief professional library smile.

Arden felt rebuffed and explained that she had come for a book on the history of Jockey Hollow.

"We haven't very much on the subject. Most of

the papers and maps telling about it were destroyed in a fire years ago. There is this book, though," she said, and going to a shelf took a thin red book from it. "They say Richard Howe, the old one, that is, refused to trust his papers to anyone but himself and they were lost when a fire broke out in Sycamore Hall while he was still living. Betty says the deeds to the old place were lost then also."

Arden took the book eagerly. It was pitifully small, she thought regretfully, but thanked the librarian and, after having it stamped, left to get one of the rickety village cabs and tell the girls all about it.

It was odd though that Betty Howe was not there, and she had not appeared at tea, either. "Oh, well," thought Arden, "perhaps she's gone into New York or some place." And holding the precious book close to her, she climbed into old Pop Warner's car and told him to take her to Sim's house. He was a talkative old man, and he knew Arden and her friends quite well. He seemed to know a lot about them, in fact, and asked her question after question as he drove her to Sim's. She squirmed with impatience and then sat bolt upright as he asked in his squeaky voice:

"Heard you was chased by a ghost in Sycamore Hall! What would your dad say if he knew you was

galavantin' around there? No place for young ladies, I'll say! Stay on your own side of the railroad tracks." Then he lapsed into silence as he turned into the driveway.

"What do you mean, Mr. Warner?" Arden asked quickly. "Who told you we were there?"

"I hear things in this business. People always talk when they're riding along. There's bound to be fire where there's smoke," he chuckled. "If I was you, I'd let well enough alone. Hannah Howe is a smart woman," he managed to say as the car stopped with a jerk. "That'll be fifty cents." He took the money and started away after a curt, "G'afternoon."

Arden felt rather suffused with the day's adventures. There had been Granny's story; then the overheard remarks from those men at the drugstore, and last but not least, the insinuations of the old cab driver.

At any rate, she had news for the girls, and she hurried up the drive and into the house to give it to them. This historical study was fast becoming a deep-dyed mystery, decided Arden.

## CHAPTER X

### The Missing Man

SIM, TERRY, AND DOT were gathered in the big living room quietly talking over their visit with Granny Howe, when Arden burst in on them in great excitement and blurted out her newest and latest story.

The "crime sheet," as they had come to call the history of the Jockey Hollow ghost story, was hurriedly taken from the locked drawer of their desk, and Arden wrote in the three new suspicious characters: Titus Ellery, Pop Warner, and the mysterious dark man mentioned as Nick.

"We'll have to go over to the Hall the first thing in the morning: they begin work early," Arden decided as she finished entering her report. "Something is going to happen, I'm sure, and we don't want to miss it. Those men at the drugstore seemed ready to pop."

"Suppose that Callahan person just tells us to go away—what then?" questioned Sim.



"Granny told us we could go through the house, and if he says anything contrary we'll tell him Mrs. Howe gave us permission. I guess he won't put up any objections then," Terry said decidedly.

So the next morning the girls tumbled out of their warm beds and dressed quickly in riding clothes, that sort of outfit being most practical for the day ahead. The dead white snow covered everything, rounding out sharp stones and smoothing corners like a layer of lovely new downy cotton. Apparently it had continued snowing for some time during the night, but now the sun was shining with a dazzling brightness and a deep blue sky promised fair weather for the day.

The girls ate a big breakfast, which pleased Moselle. She was also pleased to make sure that the girls had suddenly become too busy to bother with the house, so the precious task was all her own.

Sim got the little car out and waited impatiently while Terry went back for a woolly scarf, but she nearly exploded when Arden, as soon as Terry returned, discovered she had forgotten her gloves and had to go back for them. Eventually they got going, only to stop when Sim noticed the gasoline gage

showed nearly "empty." She decided she would have to drive to town for gas.

"Oh, Sim!" exclaimed Dot impatiently, "we've got enough to go out to the Hall and back. It will only take more time to go to a station."

"Yes, Sim, we won't be driving any place else. Don't go now," Terry begged.

But Sim was firm, and they headed toward town and stopped at a filling station, the other girls glaring at their little blonde chauffeur while the tank was being filled.

"I believe in being prepared," Sim lectured, paying the service man. "How do you know where we'll be before night?"

The words were prophetic, though Sim didn't realize it, for they were destined to have a queer experience that very day.

When they reached the road that led down to Sycamore Hall, the Hollow now being covered with snow, they saw tire tracks stretching before them. The workmen were there, of course. And they were late!

Parked in the spot they thought of as their own special place was an open truck with the name "Callahan—Contractor" painted on the back. Knowing what that meant, they looked at each other with ques-

tioning dismay. Callahan himself must be there and would not be likely to leave at once. Even as they wondered, he came marching out of the Hall, a smile on his broad ruddy face, and nonchalantly came over to their car.

Giving a tug at the brim of his shapeless soft hat he said jovially: "Well, we're back on the job again, ya' see. I've got a fine bunch of men there now. Not ordinary laborers. These men don't believe in ghosts," and taking a big black cigar from a pocket he bit off the end and searched in his pockets for a match.

Sim reached over Terry's knees, took the detachable cigarette lighter from the dash board, and smilingly handed it to the man. They watched to see what that might do.

The girls could hear the men stamping the snow off their feet in the empty house, now and then a loud crash as an iron bar or tool was carelessly dropped. The voices of the men, in good-natured badinage, floated out on the brisk air; then came shouts of laughter. Peal on peal, deep rumbling laughter, and the lighter sounds mingling together. What could this mean?

Mr. Callahan turned a pleased face to Sim as he handed back the lighter. "There! These men didn't

run. I guess they're onto the trick." He started toward the house, then stopped and said: "If you girls want to see the ghost you may as well. Come in with me, I'll show you what's been scaring my men." There was a bragging tone in his hearty voice, and a confident tread in his heavy stride.

The girls needed no urging, quickly getting out of the car and following the triumphant lead of the contractor through the light snow. Once inside, he went straight to the top of the house, walking with a precision that showed his determination. Now he would "tell the world," his attitude seemed to declare.

Reaching the third floor they found the men still merry. They were in a room similar to that where the suspected ghostly bed was, on the floor below. As the boss, with the girls, came in, it was clear the men were trying to look businesslike.

"What's the joke?" asked Callahan brusely. "What's all the laughing about?"

A young man wearing a windbreaker jacket and awkwardly holding a crowbar spoke first.

"We heard groans coming from the chimney, and Pete opened the chute in the fireplace and threw down a brick. I guess we hit the ghost, the noise stopped so quick," chuckled the workman.

"Ghost, my eye!" exclaimed another man. "Probably it was a cat or something caught in there. Well, you finished him anyway, Pete," and they were ready to laugh again.

Arden and the girls drew closer together. "There is that Nick," whispered Arden to Dot, indicating a man in the group who alone showed no amusement. He was covertly glancing at his companions, and suddenly he left the room.

In an instant he was back, bringing with him another man. Both were seriously excited.

"Any of you guys seen Jim? He was working with me across the hall, but he ain't here now," declared the new man.

"He didn't come here," answered the man who had spoken before. "What's the matter? You look worried."

Callahan stood facing the newcomer, dismay slowly blotting out the pleased expression on his face. Was this more trouble? Was ever a man so followed by bad luck? What was going on in this old house, anyway?

"What's your trouble?" Callahan was once more the boss contractor.

"I can't find Jim. He was with me, and we were

sizin' up the room, figurin' on how she would tear apart. I was at one end and Jim at another, near a closet. I saw him go in. Then I heard a funny noise, sort of groan, and when I turned around—Jim wasn't there!"

## CHAPTER XI

### Callahan Collapses

**N**ONSENSE!" snorted Callahan, chewing on the end of his cigar. "He's probably downstairs."

"No, sir, I looked! Jim ain't so well. He's been sick, and this is the first time he's been out on a job in quite a while," the workman said. "He's a swell feller. I've known him a long time. I'm afraid he's hurt."

"How could he be hurt? He hasn't even begun to work. Show me the room you were in." The contractor spoke disgustedly.

They all started for the room across the hall. The men were in various kinds of working clothes, one or two wearing ordinary business suits. These were the better class, who needed the work. Then there were regular house-wreckers in stout shoes and overalls. As a background there were the girls in their smart riding habits and bright scarfs following Callahan, whose cigar was now reduced to a soggy brown mass.

In the room from which the man Jim Danton had

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disappeared was a conglomeration of furniture. Old chairs and a rickety table piled in a group in one corner, a huge wicker clothes hamper that had been turned upside down, perhaps in the hope that Jim would fall out.

The girls could not suppress a giggle, it was so silly, and some of the men snickered too. But Jim was nowhere to be seen.

"Here's where I last saw him standing. Right here; but he wasn't there when I looked." The man who had been about to begin work with the missing Jim indicated the far end of the room.

Callahan strode over with Napoleon-like firmness. A door was closed, there; a closet door. With a huge red hand the contractor grasped the knob and wrenched it open. There was an expectant silence, then Callahan took a step forward to see better. The closet was empty!

The group pressed nearer. Three sides of dark wood but nothing more. The contractor thumped the walls vigorously.

"You're crazy, man!" he said to the puzzled wrecker. "Jim never disappeared from here."

"Well, he disappeared from some place. He's not here now," insisted the friend of Jim.

Callahan was clearly disgusted. Just when everything seemed to be going well at last, something new had to crop up. What silly persons these men were. Like a bunch of sheep. Because a few not too intelligent Negroes claimed they had seen a ghost, these men, who ought to have more sense, were already showing signs of fright because one of their group could not be found. The contractor pulled his battered gray hat down over one eye and produced a new cigar from an apparently endless supply. Then began the slapping of his pockets for matches. He looked vaguely at Sim as though remembering that she had come to his rescue before, but this time she stared back at him uncomprehending.

Callahan went to the head of the stairs and shouted over the banister. "Danton!" he called, his powerful voice booming through the house. "Jim Danton!"

But not even an echo answered him and, giving the cigar a vicious bite, he strode over to the window. "Hey, you, Danton, come here!" he shouted, but the result was the same as before.

"Maybe he got sick and started home," timidly suggested Sim in a voice that sounded ridiculously small after the Gargantuan tones of Mr. Callahan.

"Oh, no, miss," answered the worried worker. "He

couldn't go back till the truck came to take him and all of us out the main road. He lives too far. Besides, this job meant a lot to Jim. It's the first work he's had in months."

There was a discontented murmur growing among the men, and Arden could see the man whom Titus Ellery called "Nick" circulating among them and saying something in an insistent low tone. They were talking in a little group near the door of the room while Callahan questioned Jim's particular friend more closely.

Arden stepped to the open door of the closet and peered inside. Then she stooped down, and when she straightened up again she held up a small grimy object.

She turned and faced the awe-struck company, for what she was displaying was a glove such as workmen wear, of a dull white color with a dark-blue knitted band at the wrist.

"That's his glove!" exclaimed the man near Mr. Callahan. "I was with him when he bought the pair. Jim said his hands were soft from not working in so long; he needed gloves."

At this discovery the men who had been talking quietly now showed open revolt. One fellow dropped

a crowbar he had been carrying. It fell with a crash and seemed to startle them all into activity.

"Not quitting, are you?" the contractor asked, sneering. "Fine bunch of men, you are!"

"We sure are quitting, Mr. Callahan! We don't mind ghosts; but when a man disappears in broad daylight, that's too much." It was the sinister Nick who spoke. Arden thought he seemed pleased at his announcement.

The men near by shook their heads in agreement, and some put on their coats as they prepared to leave.

The weary Callahan sank helplessly down on a pile of boards and pushed his hat back on his head. This, surely, was the last straw! The men straggled out of the old house. The girls followed them. In a little while the contractor also came out.

## CHAPTER XII

### A Strange Discovery

THERE appeared to be a spirit of uncertainty among the workmen. They were not like the Negroes and Italians who had previously "seen ghosts." These new workmen were not superstitious. But even they, white-collar-class, as they were called, seemed suddenly given to some strange and nerve-racking fear. They wanted to hurry away from the old Hall where such a strange thing had seemingly just happened, but felt they owed a certain allegiance to their missing fellow worker if not to the burly and baffled boss, Callahan.

"I say, fellows," one of the men began, "I wonder if we shouldn't do something about Jim before we leave."

"What can we do?" faltered the man who had dropped the heavy bar.

It was here that Arden Blake saw her opportunity. Stepping forward with a manner and air that her girl friends warmly complimented her about, she called:

"Are you going to leave without trying to find that missing man?"

"But how can we find him?" a voice from the huddled group asked. "He just disappeared. We can't find him. There's nowhere even to look."

"But have you searched?" Arden demanded.

They seemed confused at that straightforward question.

"No," one finally murmured.

"Then come back to the house with me!" insisted Arden. "We girls will go with them, Mr. Callahan," she promised. "We'll have another good look all around. There is nothing in that house to harm anyone. And we don't believe in ghosts, so the man must be found."

"If it comes to a question of ghosts, miss," said a tall, lanky man, "I don't believe in 'em myself. But when a man is snatched away, you might say, right from under your nose, why, that's something different."

"Sure is," his friends muttered.

"Could it not very well be," asked Sim, "that this Jim Danton might have gone to some other part of the house without telling any of you, and have been hurt there?—his hammer may have slipped and hit

him on the head, knocking him unconscious. That could have happened."

"And he may be up in one of the old rooms now, injured, suffering," added Terry.

"This certainly is getting interesting, to say the least," spoke Dorothy. "I must give you girls credit for getting up some good theatrical effects in this mystery. That's quite a mob scene," and she pointed a rather languid finger at the group of workers.

"Don't make fun, Dot," said Terry in a low voice. "This may be serious." Dot was inclined to be theatrical at the wrong time.

"It is serious," declared Sim.

Arden still held the center of the stage. She felt the need of prompt, effective action.

"Well, let's go make another search," she proposed. "And don't waste time."

"We'll do that with you," said a young fellow. "But Jim didn't go to any isolated room and hit himself on the head with his hammer. In the first place, he didn't have any hammer. He was using a crowbar."

"That's right," came in a murmur, a proper mob-scene murmur, Dorothy thought, though she did not dare mention it.



"And in the second place," went on the same young fellow, "he was in that closet. I saw him go in."

"And nobody saw him come out, and there isn't even a rat-hole in that closet yet," declared another. "We haven't started ripping there."

It looked as though the fear and mystery would start all over again. But Arden was not going to give up.

"Let's go have a look," she proposed.

"That's the idea!" boomed Mr. Callahan. He was getting hopeful once more. "The girls'll put you fellows to shame! Let's all go in."

The Hall was quickly invaded with more persons than it had housed in many a long day. On the two lower floors no work of demolishing the place was visible. The men had first started tearing out the top or fourth floor. It was from the third floor that Jim Danton had disappeared.

"I wonder how much longer Mrs. Howe is going to leave some of her possessions in here?" said Sim as they reentered the big lower entrance.

"She'll have to be getting it all out pretty soon," threatened the contractor, "or I'll have to set it out for her. I don't want to damage anything of hers and have her sue me, for she's a determined woman,

though, in ways, as nice as my own mother. But she sort of feels that she is being cheated. It's none of my doing. She claims this place, and she told me she was going to leave stuff in here to enforce her claim. But it'll have to be got out of here pretty quick now. The men'll soon be down to the second floor. There's hardly any of Mrs. Howe's stuff on the third floor now. She took it away before I began my work this week." He was saying this as they tramped into the echoing old hall.

The party, scattering, though the girls kept together, looked all over the first floor. There was no sign of any missing man, though it took some little time to establish this fact, for there were many nooks, corners, passages, closets, and rooms in the lower part of the rambling old place.

The second floor, where the "ghosts" had been said to appear, was likewise devoid of any missing person, man or otherwise. They looked, one after another, calling back and forth like scouts in the woods.

"Well, he isn't here," Mr. Callahan finally announced.

"No," Arden was forced to agree, with a sense of disappointment. She had really hoped to find the man

and so dispel the unreasoning fears about the place as well as to save Jim Danton.

"Now, we'll try once more to see how it could happen that Jim could possibly have vanished out of a closet that you say hasn't even a rat-hole," spoke the contractor, as they all went up to the third floor like some awkward brigade. Some of the rooms there were open to the weather, their outer walls having been torn away in uneven patches.

"There's where he went in but where he didn't come out!" said the man who claimed to have heard the weird ghostly howling through the ash-chute.

One by one the men, the girls, and the contractor looked and stepped inside the closet. As before, it seemed as solid as any such place always seems. There were rows of old hand-forged iron hooks on the two side walls and the back, but it appeared solid; unbroken in walls and, as had been said, there wasn't even a rat-hole for escape.

"A collector would give a good deal for those hooks," said Dot. "They're real antiques."

"We're looking for a man, not antiques," said Sim, under her breath.

Mr. Callahan and some of the men stamped on the floor and kicked at the baseboards. Everything was

solid. The door was the only visible means of egress.

"And Jim didn't come out of the door!" declared several of his companions, at which all of them shook their heads in positive agreement.

"Well, it sure is queer," the contractor had to admit when they had finished inspecting the third floor, including a big room next to the one containing the closet that seemed to be the starting point of the mystery. This room had an immense fireplace, and one of the men even stooped within it and peered up the chimney.

"He isn't up there," he announced, scraping some soot and dirt down the uncovered ash-chute with his foot. "Jim isn't there."

This was terrifying. Workmen might be familiar with accidents, but the girls could hardly stand such suspense.

The entire third floor, at least the undemolished rooms, was thoroughly searched, with no result. The fourth floor and the roof over it were so nearly destroyed that it required but the briefest of inspections to make sure no missing man was there.

Baffled, the party went down to the lower hall, Mr. Callahan becoming more serious and even showing

alarm now that his workman could not be traced or located.

"What do you think now, Arden?" asked Terry in a low voice.

"I don't know what to think, but he must be some place."

"There's no use in our staying here any longer, is there?" asked Dorothy.

"I can't see what good we can do," agreed Sim.

The contractor was talking to his men off a little to one side. He was arguing against their desire to quit.

"If you go," he threatened, "you'll lose the bonus I promised to everybody who'd work a week straight here and not be scared away by silly stories. Besides, we've got to keep on looking for Jim."

"A man vanishing isn't a silly story," snarled one man.

Sim, Terry, and Dorothy were interested in the efforts of the contractor and realized that he was trying desperately to keep his force together. It was a sort of last stand with him, since so many of the more ignorant workers had left previously. Arden, hardly knowing why, wandered out and around to the

rear of the old Hall. She was tired of the confusion but did not want to give up.

"I wonder if I could think this out?" she reasoned. "There must be some answer."

In a sort of mental fog, Arden walked on a little farther into the field. She found herself in a tangle of weeds where once had been beds of flowers. There was one of the entrances to the great cellar under the old mansion, just under a little back porch.

Arden peered down the crumbling stone steps and looked past the sagging, rotting, open door into the blackness. A damp, musty smell floated up to her; perhaps the remains of the aroma that must have clung to the cellar since its days of full and plenty.

As Arden stood there, she was surprised to see a little flickering light in the darkness of the cellar. Suddenly the light, which was bobbing about like a will-o'-the-wisp, came to a stop.

"Somebody's down there!" gasped Arden. "Oh —"

A moment later she heard a scream. It was the high-pitched and frightened voice of a girl.

Then, out of the black cellar, with horror showing on her face, came running—Betty Howe!

"Oh! Oh!" she screamed. "It's terrible! Down there—in the cellar—a dead man!"

"A dead man!" repeated Arden, her mind now working fast. She wanted to be sure of her ground. "Are you sure, Betty?" she asked.

"Yes! Oh, yes! I saw him—as plain as anything!"

Betty rushed toward Arden, all but falling upon her, the flashlight still glowing. At the same moment Arden became aware of the approach of an old woman from around the corner of the house, at the rear.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Betty and the Books

ARDEN BLAKE, for a moment, did not know which to attend to first, the strange old woman or the nervous and excited Betty Howe with her gasping declaration of a dead man in the cellar.

Then, in a flash, Arden decided if there was a dead man there he must be the missing Jim. And if he were dead he would remain there. Also Arden knew Betty, but she did not know this strange woman who had so suddenly, and seemingly mysteriously, appeared on the scene.

"Don't be afraid, Betty!" Arden told the trembling girl. "We are here with you—the other girls are around in front, and so is the contractor and his men. But who is this—lady?"

The strange woman was regarding Arden with malevolent eyes, and her mouth seemed to be muttering words. Betty, who, up to this moment, did not

appear to have been aware of the other's presence, now turned and looked. She showed no surprise.

"Oh," she said in a low voice to Arden, "that is Granny's cousin, Viney Tucker. She lives with us. I guess Granny didn't mention her before, because, well—she is a little——"

Betty did not need to add the word "queer," Arden could see that for herself. But there was nothing abnormal about Viney Tucker. She had once been a handsome woman, Arden reasoned, perhaps even more so than Granny Howe.

"Cousin Viney helps Granny with the work, as she used to do when we all lived in the Hall," Betty hurried to say. "But don't bother about her. She goes and comes as and when she pleases. But the man in the cellar—the dead man. Oh, I was so frightened! What shall we do?"

"This probably explains the whole mystery," said Arden.

"What mystery?"

"About the missing workman, Jim Danton. Didn't you hear all the excitement about him, Betty?"

"No, I only just got here a few minutes ago. What do you mean about a missing man?"

"First tell me," suggested Arden, "what you were doing in the cellar."

"I was there looking for some old books that were stored down there when we moved out and over to the cottage. I happened to mention them to our librarian the other day, and he suggested that I bring some in for him to examine. He said there might be some valuable volumes among them. So I took a little time off from my work, and I came directly here—with a flashlight." This was all said in breathless haste.

"Yes," said Arden, "I see you have a flashlight."

"It's the only way to find things in the cellar—it's so dark down there with all the lights off now. And if it hadn't been for my light I, wouldn't have seen the dead man." She actually leaned against Arden and was trembling still.

"Let's hope he isn't dead," suggested Arden. "Come! We must tell the others quickly."

Up to this time Viney Tucker had neither moved nor spoken since her arrival on the scene. She stood at the corner of the house and fairly glared at the girls. Now she exclaimed:

"Ha! So there's a dead man, is there? I knew murder would be done before they finished tearing down our house! I knew it!"

"It isn't murder, Cousin Viney," said Betty.

"Well, there will be murder before this business is finished," sniffed the old woman. "And I don't like murder being done in our old house."

"And it isn't our house any more, Cousin Viney," said Betty. "That's just the trouble—we can't prove it is ours."

"If we could only find the papers! If we could only find the papers!" muttered Viney Tucker as she hurried away in the direction of the cottage. Evidently the excited woman was suffering from the wrongs she, as well as her family, felt had been done them about the Hall.

"Now we must hurry!" cried Arden. "This man you think is dead—I'm sure he's the missing Jim, and he may not be dead at all; he must be looked after. If he's injured, he'll need a doctor. Come and tell the others all about it! They're right out here."

"But I don't *know* anything about him," Betty objected as Arden fairly dragged her around to the front of the house.

"You found him—that's enough!"

The conference between the contractor and his men was still on, but Sim and the others seemed on the point of leaving. They had just become aware of the

fact that Arden was not in sight when she came into view with Betty.

"We've found the missing man. Or, rather, Betty did when she went in the cellar after books!" cried Arden all in a breath. Quickly she introduced Betty to her chums.

"You mean Jim?" shouted Mr. Callahan.

"I think so," Arden answered.

"Come on, men!" cried the contractor leading a rush around to the side cellar door. "But it'll be dark down there. We'll need some lanterns. Get one, some of you."

"Take my flashlight," offered Betty.

Mr. Callahan did, fairly snatching it away but begging her pardon a moment later.

"You can't know how upset I am," he explained. "So many things have happened today and other days. Poor Jim! How in the world did he get down in the cellar? Is he badly hurt, do you think?"

"He seemed to be unconscious," Betty answered. "But I didn't give more than a look, and I thought he was dead, so I screamed and rushed out."

"And I met her as I was wandering around that way trying to think up some reason for all this," Arden explained.

"Well, we must get help to him quickly if he's alive!" decided the contractor, and he led his hurrying men while the girls followed.

"How long were you in the cellar, Betty?" asked Arden.

"Only a few minutes. I couldn't find the box of books at first. It must have been moved. And then I saw—him!"

"And you didn't hear anything of the search we have been conducting for the last half hour?" asked Sim.

"Not the least sound. But then I was away down cellar, and the floors are very heavy."

"And we were searching the upper floors," said Terry. "Of course you couldn't hear, Betty."

Up out of the cellar, sliding and slipping on the crumbling stone steps, came the men carrying an apparently lifeless form. They had found it by means of Betty's electric torch.

"Is it the missing man?" called Arden.

"Yes, it's Jim Danton," someone answered.

"Is he—dead?"

"We don't know yet," said Mr. Callahan. "We've got to get him to a doctor pretty quick."

"Well, at any rate," said Dorothy, "the mystery of the poor man's disappearance is solved, and I hope he isn't seriously injured."

One of the men who was standing near the girls turned to answer Dorothy.

"That doesn't explain it," he said. "Jim was working on the third floor, but *how* did he get down in that cellar?"

## CHAPTER XIV

### How Did It Happen?

HAVING carried the unconscious man out of the cellar, the men stood at the top of the steps leading down into the darkness, awkwardly holding their burden. The girls had a momentary glimpse of Jim Danton's face. There was blood on it. With a little shudder and murmur of horror Dorothy turned away.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Sim.

"Can't we do something to help?" asked Terry.

"You ought to put him down—lay him down flat!" commanded Arden. "There may be broken bones! It isn't doing him any good to hold him all crumpled that way."

"He ought to have a doctor!" declared the contractor. "I wonder if it's best to try to get him home and have the doctor there or get a doctor here? Where's a telephone?"

"There isn't one anywhere near here," Betty volunteered.

"Then we'd best take him home," decided Mr. Cal-

lahan. "But how to do it? I let my partner take my car after he dropped me off here, and I don't know when he'll be back."

"I have a car!" Sim quickly interposed. "If one of you men will sit in the rumble seat and hold this man, I'll drive him home—if it isn't too far."

"Oh, he lives right here in Jockey Hollow," said the tall thin worker. "About two miles from here, down by Primrose Brook."

"I'll take him in my car, then," decided Sim. "One of you girls had better ride with me," she added in a lower voice.

"I will," Arden offered. "And I know a little about first aid, so maybe we can be of some help when we get this man home—before the doctor comes." The unfortunate man hadn't moved, nor did he seem even to breathe.

"That's right," agreed Sim. "But about a doctor?" she asked, turning to the contractor and the men gathered about him. "How are you going to get a doctor?"

"I'll run to the nearest telephone, miss, as soon as you start with Jim," the tall thin man offered. "I know the location of Jim's house. I can direct the doctor there."



"All right," Sim assented. "Take him to my car. Come on, Arden. We certainly have run into something all right—whether or not it's a mystery will develop later. But about you girls?" she asked, looking at Dot and Terry and, incidentally, at Betty.

"We'll wait here until you two come back," Terry suggested.

"Please come with me and have some tea at our cottage," invited Betty. "You can wait there."

"That will be better," Arden accepted. As the men started to carry Jim to Sim's car, she inquired, of no one in particular: "Where did you find him, and is there any explanation of how he got into the cellar?"

"He was at the bottom of an old ash-chute," said Mr. Callahan. "It opens into the cellar and connects with that big fireplace on the third floor, in the room next to the one with the closet in—the closet they say Jim disappeared from, only he couldn't. It's a very big ash-chute—big enough for a man to slide down. They must have burned whole trees in the old days, in that fireplace. And when the fire was out, instead of carting the ashes downstairs in a hod, they just opened a sort of trapdoor on the bottom of the hearth and dumped the ashes down. Only the trapdoor is rusted away now, and, somehow, Jim must have got into

the ash-chute and he slid down to the cellar, bumping his head, cutting himself and knocking himself out on the way. That's all there is to the mystery. And I'm glad of it."

His men looked relieved. One of them said:

"Then I guess Jim couldn't have gone into that closet like Nate thought he did. Though he may have gone in there, and have come out without Nate seeing him. Next he went into the fireplace room and, somehow or other, he slipped down the ash-chute."

"That's the way of it," said Mr. Callahan. "It explains everything, boys, and tomorrow we'll get on this job and clean it up. The mystery is all solved."

"In my eye!" someone muttered.

"What makes you say that, Nate Waldon?" asked the contractor.

"Because Jim did disappear right out of the closet. I know it. I didn't see him disappear, of course, but he didn't come out and go in the fireplace room."

"This is worse and more of it!" sighed the contractor. He looked at the men carefully getting Jim into the rumble seat of Sim's car and asked: "Well, what do *you* say happened, Nate?"

"All I know is I saw Jim go in that closet. I heard a noise. I heard him yell, and when I ran to the closet

he wasn't to be seen. He didn't slip out into the other room. I was close enough to have seen him if he'd done that. And we didn't find any holes in the closet. The next we know we find Jim in the cellar. Talk about mysteries being cleared up—this one isn't; not at all!"

"Oh, well, don't let's talk about it!" begged Mr. Callahan. "All of you report for work tomorrow. We'll knock off now. And I'm a thousand times obliged to you young ladies for all you've done—and are doing," he added as he saw Arden and Sim getting into the car, while in the rumble seat a man was carefully holding the still unconscious Jim, supporting his head very gently as the car started.

"We'll be back as soon as we can," Sim called to Terry and Dot as they walked, with Betty, toward the little cottage.

"Don't hurry," was the answer. "We'll be all right. And do all you can for the poor man."

"This will be a surprise for Granny," said Betty as she led the way to the cottage.

"It must have been a surprise for you," suggested Terry, "coming upon what you thought was a dead man in the cellar."

"Oh, I was scared stiff!" admitted Betty. "And I was so glad when I ran up and saw Arden. I suppose it seems presuming on such a short acquaintance to call you girls by your first names," she added with a little smile, "but, somehow, I feel as if I had known you a long time."

"Of course," Terry agreed, "we feel that way about you, too."

"Excitement makes time pass rapidly," declaimed Dot. "And there certainly has been a lot of excitement since I arrived here."

"Indeed there has been," Terry agreed.

At the cottage Granny welcomed them with her usual happy smile but asked at once:

"What has happened?"

"How did you know anything had happened?" asked Betty.

"I can tell by your faces."

"Well, I believe we do show something of it," her granddaughter admitted. "But nothing a cup of your nice tea will not help to straighten out, Granny. You know Terry and Dot?"

"Oh, yes. And we shall have tea at once. Now tell me."

They told her. Granny listened with an enigmatic look on her face, now and then her eyes showing flecks of pity as the wounded man was spoken of.

"Very strange!" she said at the end. "I can't understand it. There must be secrets about the Hall I never dreamed of. Perhaps when it is all torn down some of the secrets will come to light."

"There is some as will never see the light!" suddenly exclaimed a sharp voice from somewhere back of the hall. A woman, hard featured as to face and with straggling gray hair, suddenly poked her head out. She quite startled the girls, but Betty smiled reassuringly.

"Oh, Cousin Viney!" murmured Betty, "why do you say such things?" as if dismissing this woman.

"Did you want anything, my dear?" asked Granny kindly.

"I only want to tell you that you're having too many visitors, Hannah Howe!" was the answer. "Too many altogether! You know tea costs money, and so does cream and sugar, though I never use either."

"Won't you sit down with my company, Viney, and have a cup of tea—clear, as you always like it?" invited Granny sincerely.

"No. I've got other things to do. There's lots of

work in this cottage. Not as much as there was in the Hall—but enough!"

At that she flounced herself out, slamming the door.

Granny and Betty exchanged glances. So did Dot and Terry: it was their introduction to Viney Tucker. Arden had already met her, as Betty announced. She added:

"Don't mind her. She's Granny's cousin—just a little odd—though I don't need to tell you that. But she's kind and good," she explained as Mrs. Howe went out to get more hot water. "She thinks the world and all of Granny and of Dick and me. But there is no use denying she is a bit trying at times, and she often embarrasses us when we have company—which isn't as often as I'd like," and Betty smiled at her two new friends to make them sure of their welcome.

"I believe," she continued, "that Cousin Viney feels and resents, as one has a right in the circumstances, our loss of Sycamore Hall, more than even Granny does. She is a creature always given to solitude and—well, you know how lonely women can be," she finished.

"It does seem too bad to have such a wonderful and historic piece of property pass out of the family," Terry said. "One can hardly blame Miss Viney."

"And just to make a national park," added Dot. "Doesn't seem altogether right."

"Oh, we're all glad to have Jockey Hollow Park here in Pentville," Betty was quick to say. "It will put us on the map," and she laughed prettily. "And of course, if they decide to take in this cottage, which isn't quite sure, Granny will get something from the state for that. But she would get a lot more money, and so would Cousin Viney and Dick and I, if we could find the papers that prove we are the rightful heirs to the old Hall. As it is, it has reverted to the state. But I believe there is something about holding the estimated value of the place in court for a certain number of years to give us a chance to prove ownership. Only I'm afraid we never can."

"No," chimed in Granny entering the room just then with fresh tea, "I'm afraid we never can. There was a time when I had hope, and I did all I could to hold this man Callahan—who isn't a bad sort—from proceeding with the demolishing of the Hall. But now I have about given up. Only I don't dare tell Cousin Viney that," she added with a little laugh. "She is a die-hard and last-ditcher."

The girls enjoyed their visit, though they were a little anxious about the return of Sim and Arden.

After a while they decided they would walk around and wait rather than stay indoors, for the air outside was bracing.

"Are you going back to look for those books, Betty?" asked Terry as she and Dot took their leave.

"Not alone!" was the answer, given with a little shrug of her shoulders. Then, pleasantly thanking her, they left.

Dot and Terry walked on, back toward the Hall. The afternoon was waning. It would soon be dusk. They hoped Arden and Sim would not be too late.

"What do you think of it all, Dot?" Terry asked.

"You mean about the queer old lady? Potty, if you ask me."

"Oh, yes, a bit eccentric. But I mean about things that have happened here in Jockey Hollow."

Dot did not answer for several seconds. Then she said:

"Terry, I believe there is something mysterious here, but it isn't ghosts, though that's what you can call them."

Terry wondered what Dot meant.

## CHAPTER XV

### Jim Doesn't Know

SIM drove along as fast as she dared, with Arden sitting beside her, both girls wondering, conjecturing, and trying in vain to guess what the answer to the riddle of Jockey Hollow might be.

Now and then one of the girls, to make sure all was well, would turn to the man in the rumble seat holding his wounded friend in a slanting position against his own dust-begrimed body; and Jim was begrimed, also.

"Does he seem any better?" Arden asked once.

"No, miss. Not yet."

"He is still alive, isn't he?" asked Sim, wondering what they should do if the answer were in the negative.

"Oh, yes, miss, he's alive. I can feel his heart beating."

"That's good. Is it much farther?"

"Not much. Take the next left turn, please."

Sim did this. Down a country road, lined on each side with bare trees, they saw a small house.

"There's the place, miss! That's where Jim lives," eagerly called the helping man, who had said his name was Nate Waldon. "I'll be glad when we get him home. I hope the doctor will come soon."

"So do I," murmured Arden.

"We certainly do manage to get into the most curious mix-ups," suggested Sim as she ran the car around the bend and up as close as she could get to the house, which had a drive on one side. There was a barn in the rear, but no evidence that it was used as a garage.

It was a small house; not unlike, Arden reflected, a picture of the huts used by the soldiers of Washington's army when it was encamped in Jockey Hollow so many years ago.

At the sound of the stopping car, evidently something unusual in front of that little house, a young woman, followed by a small girl about five years old, quickly opened the door and looked out. Then, as she evidently caught sight of her husband held in the arms of Nate, she ran out, crying:

"Oh, Jim! What has happened! Are you hurt? Oh, Jim!"

Sim and Arden quickly alighted and helped Nate lift the still unconscious Jim out of the rumble seat. It wasn't easy, for the limp form was heavy.

"He's coming to, I think," said Arden in a low voice to Sim. "I saw his eyelids flutter."

"Oh, Jim! Jim!" sobbed his wife. The little girl was also sobbing now. Sim, realizing that Arden knew more about first aid than she did, took charge of the child.

"He isn't hurt bad, Mrs. Danton, I'm sure he isn't," said Nate with the ready sympathy of one worker for another's mate. "He just had a sort of a fall and he got bruised a bit and cut up and a hit on the head. But he'll come around. Mr. Callahan had one of the men telephone for a doctor. Is he here yet?"

"Not yet. Oh, Jim! Poor Jim!" wailed the excited woman.

"Now, he's all right, didn't I tell you that, Mrs. Danton? Here, pull yourself together. You've got to help this young lady and me carry him in and put him to bed and then get ready for the doctor. Now don't be fainting on us." Nate took charge promptly.

"No! No. I won't faint. But what happened?" Mrs. Danton asked.

"He just fell down an old ash-chute," Arden said as she and Nate, with the help of the man's wife, carried him into the little cottage where Sim, comforting the child, had already preceded them.

Just how they managed, Sim and Arden never had

any clear recollection afterward. But they succeeded in getting poor Jim upon a bed in a room downstairs opening out of a small but very neat little kitchen. Then, when his wife was undressing him, with the help of Nate, while Sim, in the neat kitchen, was telling the little girl a fairy story, Dr. Ramsdell arrived.

"What's going on here?" he asked in a bluff hearty voice. He did not know, and had probably not seen before, any of those whom he addressed. But he seemed, as Arden said afterward, "like one of the family."

"Oh, doctor, it's my husband!" faltered Mrs. Danton, again on the verge of tears.

"Tut! Tut! None of that!" warned Dr. Ramsdell. "We'll soon be having your husband on his feet again. A little accident, I was told," he remarked, and his eyes swept in turn Arden and Nate.

"He had a fall—at the—the ghost house," Nate answered.

"Ghost house! What joke is that?" chuckled the physician, quickly taking off his coat and gloves and picking up the black bag he had set down on a chair.

Out in the kitchen Sim was intoning to the little girl:

"And when the Prince came riding by in his automobile——"

"Didn't he have a horse?" questioned the child, smiling now.

"No, he was a new sort of Prince—he had a car."

"Oh, how queer! A fairy story with an auto. But I like it. Go on, please."

Dr. Ramsdell bent over the man on the bed. He felt his pulse, put his hand on the heart, and pulled back the closed eyelids.

"Why, he's not badly hurt!" he announced. "My goodness, this is no accident at all! Just a little shock. Here, my man! How are you? Drink this!" He had quickly mixed something in a glass of water that Arden, with ready foresight, had in waiting for him. "That's better. Now tell me the joke about the ghost house."

"It's Sycamore Hall in Jockey Hollow, where he was working," Arden supplied.

"Oh, there. Yes, I know Sycamore Hall. Old Mrs. Howe claims she ought to have it, but the Park Commission thinks differently. But this is the first I've heard about ghosts. Never mind them. That's the joke. Now, let me look you over."

It did not take Dr. Ramsdell long to ascertain that

Jim Danton was not seriously hurt. He was cut and bruised, he had a very slight concussion of the brain, but no fracture of the skull, and a week's rest would make him well again, the physician announced.

"Keep him quiet," the doctor ordered as he left. But Jim was roused now. He seemed to want to talk. "Let him tell what's on his mind if he cares to," the physician suggested as he left, having set out some medicine from his bag and given orders as to its administration.

And when the doctor had gone Jim falteringly told his story.

"How did it happen?" asked his wife, having heard Nate's version.

"I don't know, Minnie. I was up in the room with another man—I sort of forget his name—and we were sizing it up—getting ready to rip it apart——"

"Why, I was there with you," interrupted Nate.

"Oh, that's right—you were." Jim had to talk very slowly. "Well, I went in the closet to get a crowbar I'd left there."

"I saw you go in," Nate contributed. "But you didn't come out."

"No," said Jim in a curiously dull voice. "I didn't come out. All I know is that I reached for my crowbar

that was leaning against the closet wall and then, all of a sudden, it felt as though somebody hit me on the head. I fell down, and that's all I know—until just now." He sighed gratefully and pressed his wife's nervous hand.

"But what really happened to him? Who hit him?" demanded Mrs. Danton.

"That's what nobody knows," said Nate. "After Jim disappeared, we started looking for him. All but gave up when one of these young ladies found him in the cellar—unconscious."

"Neither of us found him," Arden said. "It was the granddaughter of the woman who claims to own Sycamore Hall—Betty Howe."

"Oh, that terrible ghost house!" moaned Jim's wife. "We heard stories about it before Jim went to work there—stories floating around Jockey Hollow—told by the Negro and Italian workmen. A lot of them quit. Then Mr. Callahan—Jim's worked for him before—sent out word for better men. Jim has been sick, but he decided to go."

"We needed the money so much. We are so poor—so much in debt." She had come out of the sick-room and closed the door. Her husband appeared to be

sleeping. "And there was a bonus of a hundred dollars for any man who would work a full week, ghost or no ghost. Jim said he would. He tried, but—the ghost got him!"

She hid her face in her folded arms on the table and sobbed. The little girl looked frightened.

"Stop!" commanded Arden. "You mustn't give way like this. Everything is going to be all right. Your husband isn't badly hurt. He will get well!"

"But how can we live, meanwhile?" She raised her tear-stained face.

"I will see Mr. Callahan about that," said Sim determinedly. "He must carry workmen's compensation insurance. My father does in his stores. You will be looked after. Now, don't cry. See, you are frightening Suzanne." The little girl had told her name.

"Yes, I must be brave. But, oh, that terrible ghost house. It should be burned down! It almost killed—Jim," Mrs. Danton sobbed.

"It will soon be torn down now," Arden said. "And, really, I don't believe it's a ghost house at all. Those are only silly stories. Your husband's accident is explainable on perfectly natural grounds, I'm sure we'll find out. Now we must go. But you will need help. Can't we get some neighbor in?"



"Yes, Mrs. Johnson—she lives in the next house down the road—she will come in, I think."

"I'll get her," offered Sim. "You wait here, Arden."

Sim soon returned with the kind neighbor, and as the girls had done all they could do, they said good-bye, promising to come again.

"And tell me another fairy story!" stipulated Suzanne.

"I will, my dear. You can tell your father the one I told you when he gets better, as he soon will."

"I'll do that—yes." Suzanne was cute and had fascinating dimples.

Sim and Arden drove away as the sun was beginning to set. They must pick up Terry and Dot.

"Well," remarked Sim as she speeded the little roadster along, "we've got something to think of now."

"I think," said Arden seriously as she recalled the pathetic scene back at Jim Danton's house, "that we have a stronger motive than ever in finding out about this ghost business—I mean a stronger motive than just trying to help Granny Howe prove her right to the place.

"There is something queer under all this, Sim. Men

shouldn't be hurt like this just because, possibly, somebody is playing jokes. I'm going to find out the secret of Jockey Hollow!" she declared now.

"And we're all going to help you!" Sim added. "This isn't a ghost story, it's a detective story now."

## CHAPTER XVI

### A Surprise

**T**HINKING over what had taken place that afternoon, and reviewing their own parts in the strange mystery, kept Sim and Arden rather silent on the drive back from Jim Danton's home. Then, as they were almost back at the Hall, where Terry and Dot were waiting, Sim remarked seriously:

"I don't believe it's anyone playing jokes."

"What do you mean—jokes?" asked Arden, her attention, which had wandered far afield, snapping back to the girl beside her in the roadster.

"You said," Sim replied, "that possibly somebody was playing a joke to cause these manifestations. It's a pretty serious joke, if you ask me."

"I agree with you," Arden answered. "But there are persons with a very strange sense of humor."

"I wish some of them had to fall down the ash-chute as Jim did!" Sim exclaimed snappishly. "It would jar some of the humor out of them."

"I don't really believe I meant that, about it being a joke," went on Arden. "But I'm determined to find out what's at the bottom of it all. It must be real and it must have humans in it."

"And I'm with you!" declared Sim. "But I have a new thought, Arden!"

"What, Mistress Sim?" asked Arden. "I declare I'm reverting to Colonial talk, thinking so much about this ancient place," and she laughed. "But let me have your thought."

"Could it be labor troubles?" asked Sim. "I mean, could some other contractor, who resented Mr. Callahan having the job of tearing down this old mansion, be trying to scare his men off so Mr. Callahan would give up the contract? Isn't that possible?"

"Yes, possible."

"You know," went on Sim, "while there may not be very much money for a contractor in just pulling down an old mansion, this one is of Revolutionary importance, and there may be what the boys would call 'pickings,' that would sell for a good sum."

"You mean like those hand-forged hooks in the closet where Jim disappeared from?"

"Yes. So it may be that some rival contractor is

trying to force Mr. Callahan to give up by frightening his men away."

"It's an idea," admitted Arden, after thinking it over. "But why haven't some of these alleged jokers been caught?"

"Because they have been working on the fears of ignorant men."

"You can't exactly call Jim and his workers ignorant," Arden objected.

"No. But this is the first time anything happened to them. And it was all so mixed up, no proper search was made at the moment of the scare. If it had been, something might have been found out."

"Well, I hope *we* can find out something," Arden suggested. "It's sad to think of a poor man hurt on the first work he gets after months of idleness. And that little family was in a sad state."

"Yes. We must make sure that Mr. Callahan does something for them—workmen's compensation relief or something like that."

Arden nodded. She was very thoughtful, and Sim, noticing that her chum's thoughts had evidently taken a new turn, asked:

"Have you any other theory as to how this happened to Jim?"

"I was just wondering if anyone could have slipped into that closet, stolen up behind Jim, hit him on the head, and then put his unconscious body down the ash-chute?"

"I don't see how they could, with another man in the same room."

"No, I suppose not. Well, it's baffling, certainly."

As they made a turn in the road which would put them on the main highway leading back to the Hall and Jockey Hollow, they saw a horseman leading a riderless mount coming out of the woods.

"It's Dick Howe!" exclaimed Arden.

"Yes," Sim agreed.

The young groom saw them at the same moment and held back his horses until they could ride past, which they did, coming to a stop a little way beyond him.

"Hello, Dick!" Arden greeted.

"Afternoon, ladies—or I might almost say evening," Dick answered. The slanting rays of the fast-setting sun shone on his face, and the girls were surprised to see that it was bleeding. He noticed their quick attention drawn to him and, putting up a hand to wipe away some trickling blood, remarked. "Yes, my horse got a bit skittish and ran me under a low

branch. I hope it doesn't leave a scar," and he laughed lightly.

"Is it deep?" asked Sim anxiously.

"Not at all—just a scratch. I've been taking an old gentleman out for a canter—had to deliver a horse to him and lead it back—lead it both ways, in fact. And Highboy," he patted his own mount, "is always troublesome with a led critter near him. He tried to bolt with me more than once. You girls going riding again soon?"

"I hope so," Sim said. "But you know, with Christmas just around the corner, we won't have much time until after that and then we'll have to go back to school."

"That's so," Dick agreed. "Well, turn all the business my way that you can, or, rather, Ellery's way. We need it! And if I don't see you again, why, Merry Christmas!"

"The same to you," they answered.

Arden waved to Dick as Sim stepped on the accelerator, and the car shot away, leaving the young groom and his two horses bathed in the red sunset light, the crimson rays matching the blood on his cheek.

"Rather queer," remarked Sim as they made the

last turn before reaching the road that ran past the Hall.

"What?" asked Arden.

"Dick getting hurt that way. I mean he's such a good rider, you would think he might have ducked the branch that hit him."

"You can't tell what a horse will do," declared Arden. "What, just, did you mean?"

"Well," Sim went on, slowing down to avoid some ruts, "I was thinking it would be queer if Dick had been around the old Hall when Jim was hurt and maybe he got hurt the same way—or something like it."

"But Dick wasn't there. He was off with an old gentleman going for a ride."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, it was only a notion. But there are enough queer things happening—this would only be one of them. Betty was there at the house, you know."

"But I'm sure Dick wasn't. Look, there are Terry and Dot waiting for us."

They saw the two girls walking up and down in front of the Hall. The afternoon was fast passing. They had spent more time than they realized.

"So you finished your visit with Granny?" asked Sim.

"Yes, we had tea again. Betty is very nice. So is Granny. But the cousin—she's queer," related Terry.

"Oh, so you met Viney Tucker?" asked Arden.

"She poked herself in at us," said Dot. "But what happened to you?"

Arden and Sim told, and said something about the strange closet.

"Let's go in now and have a look at it while none of the workmen is around," suggested Arden enthusiastically.

"No, it's too dark!" objected Terry. "I don't believe in ghosts any more than you do, but going in that queer old house when it's as dark as it's going to be soon, doesn't appeal to me."

"Nor me!" said Dot.

She and Terry climbed into the rumble seat, and they were all soon back at Sim's house. The way seemed short, for they had plenty to talk about.

It was quite dark when they arrived. Moselle opened the door for them and exclaimed:

"I sure am glad you-all have come back!" There was a tone of relieved anxiety in her voice.

"Why?" drawled Sim. "Have you been seeing ghosts, too, Moselle?"

"No. But a gentleman named Harry Pangborn has been telephonin' an' telephonin' all the afternoon, wantin' to know when you-all would be back. He seemed quite set up about it. I couldn't give him any satisfaction. But he——"

The telephone jingled smartly.

"That must be him again!" exclaimed Moselle scurrying in.

"Harry Pangborn!" cried Terry.

"What a delightful surprise!" voiced Sim.

"I wonder what he wants?" murmured Arden.

## CHAPTER XVII

### Some Real Investigating

M OSELLE called from the telephone in the back hall:

"Oh, Miss Sim! It's the gentleman again—Mr. Pangborn!"

Sim hurried to the instrument while the other girls looked at one another, laughter in their eyes and with hearts beating faster.

"Our old friend of the orchard masquerade," said Arden.

"Do you suppose he's going to vanish again—take another name and get into some other mystery?" asked Terry.

"I hope he's coming here to spend Christmas!" Dot was very frank in her desires. "It would be a change from ghosts and musty old houses."

"Hush!" warned Arden. "The phone is open—he'll hear us."

They were chattering loudly near where Sim was

speaking and listening over the telephone. They heard her say:

"Oh, but how nice! Of course!—Come right over. We'll have dinner in a little while, and there'll be a place for you.—Oh, yes, we have been very busy.—What?—I'll tell you when you come over. But what are you doing in this part of the country?—We thought you were enjoying your millions.—Oh, getting even with me, I see—you'll tell us when you get here.—Yes, this place is easy to find. All the taxi men know it. See you later!"

Sim danced back through the hall to where her friends waited with anxiety to hear the other half of the conversation.

"Was it really Harry Pangborn?" demanded Arden.

"Of course it was and is! He's coming over!" Sim laughed merrily.

"But why?"

"How?"

"What for?"

"Wait! Wait!" begged Sim, holding her hands up to ward off her importunate chums. "He's going to explain it all when he comes over. It seems he just arrived in Pentville this afternoon. He was nice

enough to say he remembered that we all lived here, and he's lonesome, so he's been keeping our line busy. He almost gave up finding us in."

"But what's he out here for?" asked Terry.

"Came especially to see you, my dear," laughed Sim.

"Oh, be serious!" begged Arden.

"Well, I can safely wager he didn't come to see me," Dot put in. "I really hardly met him. You three monopolized him at Cedar Ridge and then got his thousand dollars' reward."

"*We* didn't get the thousand dollars," Sim said. "It was really the college swimming pool."

"And Arden solved that mystery," added Terry, referring to one told of in *The Orchard Secret*.

"If I can only solve this one of Jockey Hollow I'll go in for mystery solving as a profession," Arden laughed. "I might major in it at Cedar Ridge."

"Perhaps," suggested Dot, "now that Harry Pangborn is here, he can help you."

Arden looked at the visitor. Was there anything sarcastic in the remark? Hardly, for Dot smiled brightly.

"I still can't guess why he has come here," said Terry.

"You shall know very soon, child," mocked Sim.

"Now we must get busy and wash our faces. And, oh, I wonder what sort of a dinner Moselle can give us? I must have a talk with her. Run along, girls, get painted and powdered, and I'll follow as soon as I can."

Shortly after this, Harry Pangborn drove up to the Westover home in a "small but expensive car," as Dot remarked, catching a glimpse of its gleaming lamps out on the drive. The young man came in, bronzed as to complexion, smiling charmingly, and showing his white even teeth, and greeted the girls with the comradeship of a co-ed.

"So glad to see you again," he told them. "And now, as I heard Sim say she wondered why I was here, I'll tell you. I'm here in this particular place because I am lonesome for such company as yours." (That was being gallant.) "And I'm in Pentville because I have a mission to perform in Jockey Hollow."

"Jockey Hollow!" cried the four girls together.

"Do you mean you are going to try to rid Sycamore Hall of its ghosts?" asked Arden a moment later.

"Ghosts!" exclaimed young Mr. Pangborn. "I don't know anything about ghosts and less about Sycamore Hall. What's the joke?"

"Ever since they got me here," supplied Dot, who

seemed rather "taken" by the young fellow, "these girls have done nothing but discover ghosts—ghostly noises, dead women on a bed, a man mysteriously missing and found in a cellar—and it all happened at Sycamore Hall, an old Revolutionary mansion in Jockey Hollow that is going to be torn down to make room for a new road."

"This is news to me," said Harry Pangborn. "I didn't count on this when I was asked to come to Jockey Hollow. But it's—grand!"

"Just why were you asked?" Sim wanted to know.

"Well, you are familiar with the fact that I fell heir to my grandfather's estate on Long Island," was the answer. "On it is a big wooded park, and as I happen to be a nature lover, and a wild bird enthusiast in a small way, I carried out some ideas started by my late grandfather and have built up quite a bird sanctuary, as they are called—a place for the conservation of all wild life; you know, of course. I put some new ideas into my experiments. Word of it got around, and I was asked by Dr. Max Thandu, the State Park Commissioner here in your part of the country, to make a sort of survey of Jockey Hollow and lay out a bird sanctuary there. I agreed, for I thoroughly believe in this sort of thing."

"You mean you are going to work around here?" Dorothy asked.

"Work," echoed Arden. "What Harry does is never just—work." She had called him "Harry," and a self-conscious flush made her look even prettier.

"I understand Jockey Hollow, with its Revolutionary associations, is to be made a state or national park," Harry went on, smiling kindly at Arden. "The bird sanctuary will only be incidental to its historic value. But I am glad to do my little part there. So, having some leisure time, and the Christmas season being rather a hectic time down our way, and being fond of the woods in winter and solitude—in a way—I decided to use my Christmas vacation by coming to Jockey Hollow and getting some first-hand information."

"What could be nicer for us?" Sim complimented.

"Are you going to stay until after Christmas?" Arden inquired.

"I hope to. I understand Jockey Hollow is rather a big place, and it will take me several days to survey it, locate proper places for feeding stations, and arrange for a water supply for the birds. When I told Dr. Thandu I would come here, I suddenly happened to remember that you Cedar Ridge girls lived out this



way, and so I'm afraid I kept the operator rather busy this afternoon giving her your number, Sim."

"Oh, that, too, would have been kind of you. Central isn't ever very busy here. I'm sure she rather enjoyed it. The girls listen in, you know."

"She hasn't anything on me!" he laughed. "Well, now you know why I'm here." They had all settled down comfortably, and it seemed, with Harry there, their party was complete.

"But I thought you said," remarked Dot, "that you wanted solitude for Christmas," her eyes were mischievous.

"Oh, well, there is solitude—and *solitude!*" he countered, his gaze sweeping them all in turn, but lingering upon Arden. "But tell me about the ghosts. Are they just too—too divine?"

They told him at dinner, which was a success in every way, Moselle and her daughter doing themselves proud in the viands and the serving thereof. Moselle simply loved company, especially young men company.

"Now, what do you think of it all?" Arden asked when the various phases of the happenings at the Hall had been recounted.

Harry Pangborn was silent for a moment as he crushed the ashes of his cigarette on the plate.

The girls waited, not a little anxiously, for his opinion. It was good to have a man around—especially such a delightful young man as Harry Pangborn—one whom they knew and could trust.

"Well?" asked Sim, at length.

"Well," he blew out a cloud of smoke, "it sounds to me like either one of two things," came the answer, slowly given. "It's either a trick of some mischievous person or persons, as you have hinted, perhaps engineered by a rival contractor. Or—" again a pause—"there may be something in it."

"Do you really mean—ghosts?" gasped Terry.

"Well, perhaps what some persons call ghosts," the young man answered. "Let us say natural manifestations that take on a weird meaning or significance because they are not understood. I now have a double duty here. I'm going to lay out the Jockey Hollow bird sanctuary and——"

He lighted a fresh cigarette.

"If you'll leave this to me," he continued as he inhaled the aromatic smoke, "I'll do some real investigating, if you want me to."

"It really ought to be done," said Arden gladly.

"We want to help Granny Howe if we can, to put her in a position where she can claim this property; though it seems hopeless after all these years. And we also want to help this Jim Danton. We'll be so grateful for your help, Harry, and we are so relieved to have you here—just now."

"Such as it is, you shall have it!" promised Mr. Pangborn.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## The Figure in Red

ARDEN BLAKE fairly jumped into her bedside slippers, drew on a dressing gown, and in an instant was at the window.

"What's the matter?" sleepily inquired Terry, who was in the other twin bed. "Has anything happened?"

"It's snowing again," Arden answered. "I awoke a little while ago and I heard tiny tappings against the window. I wondered what it was and I waited a decent time, so I shouldn't awaken you, to find out."

"Nothing to do with the mystery, has it?" yawned Terry.

"No, silly! It's just snowing. It's going to be a glorious storm, much better than the other little fairy we had, I believe, and oh, don't you just love snow for Christmas?"

"That's so, Christmas is coming," Terry admitted as she sat up in her bed and watched Arden, still at the window. "What time is it?"

"Nearly eight. Too sleepy still to see the faithful clock right before you," teased Arden.

"Sim and Dot up yet?"

"I haven't heard them moving." Arden inclined an ear toward the room across the hall where their hostess and the other girl slept.

"Well, then, come on back to bed," urged Terry. "No use getting up until Sim does. And we stayed up so late last night, talking to Harry Pangborn, that I'm sleepy yet."

"I'm not, and I'm going to dress. I have something to do," declared Arden with a purposeful look on her face.

"What? Going to see Harry? I think he's awfully nice."

"He is, but I'm not going to see him. I'm going to the woods to get some holly branches. I noticed a lovely lot of bushes some distance back of the old Hall when I was wandering around by the cellar door that time Betty Howe popped up out of it."

"With horror on her face, as they say in books," drawled Terry.

"Yes, she was terrified all right," admitted Arden. "Who wouldn't be, coming upon what looked like a dead man? And that's another thing we must do."

"My, aren't we the busy girls!" laughed Terry. "What else, for goodness' sakes? I might as well get up and dress, I suppose. There'll be no sleep for me now with you barging around."

"Another thing we must do," said Arden as she began to dress, "is to see to it that Jim Danton's poor little family gets some relief from Mr. Callahan or somebody. He was hurt while working for the contractor, and the contractor should pay. That's the law."

"It wasn't exactly his fault, though," Terry argued. "Mr. Callahan might claim, as they say they do in some insurance policies, that it was an act of God, an unforeseen calamity, and so get out of it—I mean he might say it was the ghost of Jockey Hollow."

"I hardly believe he would do that," remarked Arden, brushing her hair vigorously. "But it surely is puzzling. Well, we'll see what Harry Pangborn can figure out of it, though I think, since we sort of promised, in a way we should try and do something for the Danton family. There is no social service agency around here."

"Yes, somebody must help them, and they seem nice folks, too. But about this holly, what are you going to do with it specially?"

"Decorate this place for Christmas, of course. Coming with me?"

"I suppose so. Dot and Sim will, I imagine."

"Yes, we'll make a little party of it. Oh, I do love to walk in the snow, and it's coming down beautifully!" raved Arden. "Do come and look, Terry!"

"Wait until I get this shoe on. Though if we're going to tramp in the snow I suppose I'd better wear heavier ones."

"You won't need them with arctics. But isn't it a glorious storm!"

Terry agreed that it was. The two chums finished dressing and went out in the hall to go down for breakfast, which was evidently being prepared by Moselle and her dark daughter, as testified to by the rattling of dishes and the aroma of bacon and coffee floating up.

As Terry and Arden were walking toward the stairs, they heard the door of Sim's room open, and Dot came out, wearing a robe. She held her finger on her lips as a signal for silence.

"What's the matter?" whispered Arden.

"She has a bad headache," Dot replied. "She was awake a good part of the night, and she's just fallen asleep. I thought I'd slip down and tell Moselle not

to make any more noise than she can help. Sim needs quiet."

"Oh, that's too bad!" murmured Terry. "I wonder if there's anything we can do?"

"No, I gave her some aspirin. She'll be all right. If you're going down, would you mind having that little slave bring me up some coffee? That's all I want. I'll be waiting out in the hall so I won't disturb Sim by opening the door too often."

"It's too bad," murmured Terry again. "Can't you come down and have some breakfast with us?"

"No, coffee is all I'll take. Some storm, isn't it?"

"Terry and I were going out for a walk in it," whispered Arden, "and to gather some holly branches to decorate the place here for Christmas. We hoped you and Sim would come, but if she has a headache I guess we'll postpone the trip."

"No reason why you should," Dorothy argued, walking to the head of the stairs with the others to avoid whispering so much outside Sim's door. "I'll stay here with her. I don't feel much like walking in the snow, though I love fresh-grown holly. Get all you can, and by the time you come back I'll be ready to help decorate, and perhaps Sim's head will be better."

"All right," agreed Arden. "I have my mind set on it, and I don't like to change. You'll come, Terry?"

"Oh, yes."

Dot had her coffee, the other girls making a more substantial breakfast, and then, leaving Sim still asleep and Dot on guard, Terry and Arden set out into the storm. The flakes were coming down rapidly now, dry, small flakes that seemed to presage a heavy fall. It was not yet deep, but would be, as none was melting.

"Oh, it's so lovely!" murmured Arden raising her face to let the snowflakes melt on it.

"You seem to have quite a yen on for storms," remarked Terry, laughing.

"I always have had. Now we must step out. It's quite a distance to the old Hall, and it's slow walking in the snow."

"I'm equal to it," declared Terry, bracing up and dashing forward.

They trudged along, laughing and talking—talking principally of the advent of Harry Pangborn and his declaration that he would do some real investigating of the mysterious happenings in Jockey Hollow.

"I wonder if he'll really discover anything," said Terry as they neared the place.

"He might," was Arden's opinion. "He has a good head, I believe."

"He has nice teeth, anyhow."

"To bite ghosts with, I suppose!" laughed Arden.

"Yep! Well, I can see the place now," remarked Terry as they topped a little rise. "There doesn't seem to be any men working there, though—no plaster dust floating out of the windows as usual when men are tearing down an old building."

"It is quiet," Arden admitted as they walked in front of the Hall. "I suppose Mr. Callahan is wondering what sort of workmen to get next, since his white-collar class has left, apparently."

"Look!" Terry suddenly exclaimed, pointing. "Footprints in the snow. At least one man has gone in there!"

"That is very evident, Robinson Crusoe," laughed Arden. "As your man Friday, I agree with you. Someone has gone in, and one man only, judging by the footprints. And as these are plain footprints and not little scratchy marks in the snow I think we may safely argue that it is no ghost."

"Who said it was?" countered Terry. "But what can one workman do in tearing down such a big house?"

At that moment a head was thrust out of an upper and partly demolished window and a voice cheerily called:

"Good-morning, girls!"

"Oh, it's Harry Pangborn!" exclaimed Arden.

"Hello, Harry!" greeted Terry. Since the episode at Cedar Ridge, the friends had begun to call one another by their first names.

"What are you doing in there?" Arden called back.

"Investigating ghosts, as I promised. Want to help me?"

"We're after holly," said Terry, "in the back woods."

"Well, you have time for both ghosts and holly too, perhaps."

"No, thank you," Arden decided, shaking some of the snow off her hat. "I think you can do your investigating alone. I mean, you come to it with an open mind. Terry or I might suggest something to you, in our eagerness, and that would throw you off the track." They were so near the Hall they could talk easily to the young man at the window above.

"There is something in what you say," admitted Harry with an assumed judicial air. "I shall take it under consideration. Well, then, I'll go on investigat-

ing by myself, reserving the right to call at Sim's house to see you all, later, and report."

"Yes, do!" invited Terry.

"Have you found anything yet?" Arden wanted to know.

"I only arrived a few minutes ago. Well, on with the ghost hunt! Stop in if you come past this way, and I'll help you carry the holly branches home."

"Oh, that will be fine!" called Terry. "I was wondering how we could carry enough to make really satisfactory decorations."

"But I draw the line at a Yule Log!" stipulated the young millionaire, whose car, the girls now noticed, was parked near a big clump of lilac bushes that nearly concealed it. He had driven in from a direction opposite that which they had traversed and so they had not seen the tire marks.

"Did you come here this morning just to investigate?" pressed Arden as young Pangborn started away from the window and she and Terry were about to walk on.

"Well, I came to look into the matter of bird-feeding stations for the sanctuary Dr. Thandu wants to establish here, and so I decided I might also take in the Hall. It's quite a place."

"Killing two birds with one stone," quoted Terry tritely.

"Exactly! See you later!"

He waved a hand to them and disappeared back into the strange old house.

It was a little farther to the small grove, where the holly trees and bushes grew, than Arden realized and it was perhaps ten minutes after their good-bye to the ghost-hunter that the two girls found a thicket sufficiently large to ensure a good supply of branches with their lovely red berries and dark, prickly, glossy leaves. Holly is always just holly; hard, sharp, but magnificent on its trees.

They had good pocket knives and soon cut off a quantity—more, Arden suggested, than they could carry even with the help of Mr. Pangborn, when Terry, glancing off toward a little clearing, suddenly cried:

"Look!"

There was something in the tone of her voice that startled Arden. But she managed to ask, as she whirled quickly around:

"What is it?"

"A figure in red!" whispered Terry, pointing.

"There—through the trees—someone in red—mov-

ing. Oh, perhaps it's the ghost of Patience Howe! She is always seen wearing a red cloak, you know!"

Arden dropped the holly branches from her hand as she looked toward where Terry pointed.

Something was moving! Red, in all that deep, dark clump of evergreens!

## CHAPTER XIX

### Santa Claus

TERRY AND ARDEN drew closer together, instinctively, for mutual protection. It was uncanny to see this strange, scarlet figure capering about in the little clearing, seen through a screen of fir trees and against a background of gleaming white snow.

"The ghost of Patience Howe," murmured Arden, recalling the story Granny had told—recalling what the men had said about seeing an apparently dead woman, in a red cloak, on a bed in the old Hall. And that figure had mysteriously vanished.

Now it was in sight again—at least, some figure was there. There was no mistaking it, for it was too plain to be anything else but a moving elfin thing.

"Oh," whispered Terry, "do you think, Arden, that Harry could have disturbed it?"

"Disturbed what?"

"This ghost—I mean, perhaps he came upon the place where it hides in the house and it ran out—no,

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ghosts don't run, they sort of float, like smoke, don't they? Oh, Arden, I'm frightened!"

Then, fascinated, they watched and saw the red-clad figure seemingly capering about, doing a strange dance in the snow. And suddenly it started toward where they were half hidden by bushes and trees. Coming toward them!

"Oh!" screamed Terry. "Come on, Arden!" She turned to run, uttered a sudden cry of pain as she clutched her right ankle and sank down helplessly in the snow.

"Terry! What is it?" begged Arden, dropping to her side.

"My ankle! I twisted it when I turned to run! Oh, how it hurts! I hope I haven't broken it!"

"I don't believe you did, my dear! Ankles don't break as easily as that. Oh, I'm so sorry!" She took some snow up in her hand and pressed it on Terry's forehead, now wrinkled with pain. It flashed into Arden's mind that she was going to have trouble getting Terry back to Sim's house—walking with even a slightly sprained ankle was out of the question. Then, with a feeling of relief, she thought of Harry in the ghost house. She would have to leave Terry there in



the snow, however, to go get him to come to the rescue.

"I'm so sorry," Arden murmured. "Poor Terry!"

"It was silly of me—making so much trouble. But, oh, Arden—the red ghost! Look, it's coming right for us!" She was facing in the direction of the strange red figure; Arden had her back toward it. But at Terry's cry Arden looked around, and then she had to laugh, even with all the trouble they seemed to be in. And a moment later Terry also laughed, in spite of her pain.

For it was no red-cloaked ghost of Patience Howe that was bouncing over the snow toward the two girls. It was—Santa Claus!

A rotund figure of a jolly little man with a real beard of lovely white hair—no cotton whiskers on this St. Nicholas—came prancing through the underbrush, scattering snow. He was no ghost, the girls were assured of that in a moment, for he addressed them in very human accents. But even with all this reality it was a puzzle.

"Well, well, young ladies! I thought I heard somebody scream!" began the little man. "I was over in that clearing, practising, and I saw you behind the trees, and I sort of thought you'd think it queer, and

I turned to come and explain. Then I heard a scream and——"

"My friend turned suddenly and sprained her ankle," Arden interposed. "It is very painful—I'm afraid she can't walk."

"Luckily I can take care of that," said Santa Claus. "It was partly my fault, I reckon. Gave her a start, naturally—seeing me in this rig. That's why I came out here to try it on. I knew it would look sort of silly to anybody who didn't understand. I'm terrible sorry."

"But why are you dressed up this way?" asked Arden. Terry was just about able to stand and, resting with her head on her chum's shoulder, her face showed she was suffering. Really the ankle was very painful.

"It's easy explained," said the little man, pulling at his luxuriant beard, a thing he never would have dared to do had he been wearing a masquerade whiskers. "My name is Janson Henshot. I live over at Bayley Corners, and I'm superintendent of the Sunday-school there. Up to this year we always had, for the Sunday-school children, the little ones, you know, a Santa Claus with a false beard. The part was played, off and on, by Jake Heller or Sam Bendon.

"But last year one of the little boys gave the beard

of Santa Claus a pull when he was handing out the presents, and the beard came off, and it sort of spoiled things. So, when Christmas was talked of this year, somebody said I'd do fine for Santa Claus, as my beard's real and it'll stand a lot of pulling and won't come off!" He demonstrated, laughing.

Even Terry smiled now, for she was listening and had opened her eyes. This, truly, was a comical experience, to find a real Santa Claus in a real wood.

"So I said I'd be Santa Claus," went on Mr. Hen-shot. "All I needed was the uniform, and my wife made this one. Not bad," and he looked proudly at his red coat and trousers, trimmed with real white rabbit fur, and at his glossy black boots.

"It's perfect!" declared Arden.

"Glad you like it! Well, after I got the uniform and I didn't have to raise any beard, I decided I needed some practice to act right as Santa Claus, me never having played the part before, though I've watched the others. So I put the uniform in my old flivver and came out here in the woods to rehearse, as you might say. This is the second time I've done it. I act like I think the old fellow would act with a lot of happy children around him—sort of skipping and prancing. Am I keeping you too long? I wanted to get it down

right before I went out into that Sunday-school crowd. And that's what I was doing—rehearsing—when you saw me. Guess you must have thought it sort of odd."

"We—we thought you were a ghost!" murmured Terry.

"Ghost! My stars!"

"The ghost of Patience Howe, on account of the red," explained Arden.

"Oh—Patience Howe—I see—her as is supposed to have been around Sycamore Hall in the Revolution and hid her horse from the soldiers. Yes, that's a story around here, but I don't know—ghosts—no such animals if you ask me!" He laughed heartily.

"I suppose you have heard," suggested Arden, "that the ghost of Patience, in her red cloak, is said to wander around the old Hall at times."

"Oh, yes, I've heard that story, but nobody I know ever saw any ghost like that. Though, now you speak of it, I did hear that the contractor who's tearing down the Hall has been having trouble with his men on account of queer happenings. But I don't take any stock in 'em. Just rantings of the Negro and Italian laborers, I reckon."

"Some queer things have happened there," said Arden. "But now what are we going to do? I must

get Terry home as soon as possible—a doctor must look at her ankle at once!”

“I know—sprained ankles can kick up quite a fuss. But as I’m sort of to blame for this, I’ll do my best to remedy the trouble. I shouldn’t have kept you here so long talking, by golly! I’ve got my flivver parked over near where I was rehearsing. I can run it here—no trouble at all—my flivver’ll go up the side of a barn. And we’ll put your friend in and I’ll run her home in a jiffy, if you want me to.”

“I think that will be the best thing to do,” said Arden. “We have a friend in Sycamore Hall——”

“You have!” cried Mr. Henshot. “Why, I was told Granny Howe couldn’t prove title to the place and she had to get out and it’s being torn down.”

“That’s right,” Arden assented. “But the friend I speak of is just in there temporarily, looking for ghosts.”

“My stars!” exclaimed Santa Claus. “Well, I’ll go get my flivver. Be back right quick. Don’t let her step on her ankle. I’m mighty, mighty sorry this happened!”

He ran away with surprising speed for such an elderly man, his white beard flying in the wind, and almost before Arden could shift Terry to a little easier

position on her shoulder Mr. Henshot was back with his creaking roadster.

To Arden’s surprise he still wore his Santa Claus suit.

“Aren’t you going to take that off?” she asked, for she knew he had it on over his other clothes.

“Got no time!” he said briskly. “We got to get this young lady to a doctor right away. I’ll drive you just as I am. I don’t mind,” he said quickly. “It’s in Pentville, and nobody’ll know me there. I wouldn’t want to drive through Bayley Corners like this, for it would sort of spoil things for the youngsters if they see me ahead of time. But it’s all right in Pentville. Drive you just the way I am!”

Terry was feeling too miserable to object, and Arden realized it would be useless. Besides, she knew Terry must have her injured ankle looked to as soon as possible. After all, perhaps no one the girls knew would see them.

Terry managed to hobble on one foot and, assisted by Arden and Santa Claus, was placed on the rear seat of the car with her chum to hold her against the rough riding. For it would be rough getting out of the stretch of woods and clearing.

“Might as well take this holly you picked,” said

Mr. Henshot. "It'll look right pretty in the car with me dressed like Santa Claus and all this snow coming down. A regular white Christmas!" he chuckled. "Right pretty!" He piled the branches in with the girls, putting some in the empty seat beside him, and slid under the wheel.

Then he started the car, driving carefully, after Terry gave a little moan of pain at a sudden jolt.

"I'll have to take a short cut," he explained, "so we can't go past the Hall and pick up your ghost-hunting friend. Sorry, but I can't go that way."

"It's all right," said Arden. "He has a car."

She wondered what those who saw the strange outfit would say, but this held only a moment's interest. Terry's injury might mean a curtailment of some of the Christmas festivities, besides all poor Terry's suffering.

They were out of the woods at last and on a smoother road, not having passed either Granny's cottage or the Hall. In a short time they were on the outskirts of Pentville and entered the town by a back road. So not many saw them, and those who did, while they smiled and laughed and pointed, put it down to an advertising stunt. Arden saw no one she

knew, Terry saw nothing but Arden's kind shoulder which she leaned against.

But when the auto of the modern Santa Claus drew up at Sim's house and Moselle answered Mr. Henshot's ring at the door, she jumped back with fright.

"Mercy sakes alive! Whatever is this? A real live ——" Moselle was most eloquent when silence seized her.

## CHAPTER XX

### Harry Hears Something

MOSSELLE's involuntary shout of surprise and alarm brought Dorothy on a run to the front door. She gave one look at Terry and Arden seated in the flivver, surrounded by holly branches, another look at Santa Claus, and then laughingly demanded:

"Where do you play the next performance?"

"It isn't any play, Dot!" called Arden. "Terry's hurt!"

"Hurt!" She was serious in a moment.

"It's only a sprained ankle," said Terry, trying to speak with vigor. "All my own fault."

"No, it's my fault," insisted Santa Claus.

Moselle, her eyes almost popping from her head, had retired to the back hall, but was still peeking and listening.

"This is Christmas and then some," said Dorothy.

"But whatever happened?"

Explanations were quickly made, amid contrite apologies from Mr. Henshot for his part in Terry's accident. She was helped into the house and a doctor summoned. Then, having asked several times if he could be of any further service, aside from carrying in the holly branches, which he did, and having been thanked for what he had done, further help being graciously declined, the little man took himself away.

"But first," he said, with a jolly laugh, "I'll take off my disguise—all but my whiskers. I need them. And without my red suit there will be no chance for the children of Bayley Corners to recognize me.

"If you folks haven't anything else to do," he said to Arden and Dorothy when Terry had been put to bed, with Sim (whose headache was better) to sit beside her, "why, we'd be glad to have you over at the Bayley Corners Sunday-school entertainment—me playing the part of Santa Claus after my rehearsals," he chuckled.

"Thank you," murmured Arden, trying to be cheerful about it.

Dr. Blasdell gave it as his opinion that Terry's ankle wasn't as bad as she feared. It was strained, not sprained, and bound to be painful, but a day or two of rest would make it all right, the physician said, and

she could get around, though she might want to use a cane for a while.

"You can still go ghost-hunting," said Arden, when they were all gathered in Terry's room to commiserate with her.

"I'm getting sort of fed up with it," Terry said. "I believe it will all turn out as this ghost of Patience Howe did—in a Santa Claus outfit."

"Well, if we could play Santa Claus to Granny Howe," suggested Arden, "and find some way to do something so she could get the money for this property that has been taken by the state for Jockey Hollow Park, it would be the best Christmas gift we could give her, I'm sure of that."

"And it would help Dick to his college education and Betty to realize her ambition to become an interior decorator," added Sim.

"But I suppose it is too much to hope for," sighed Arden. "I imagine we shall have to be content if we can find the troublesome old ghost."

"Or even if Harry Pangborn finds it," said Terry.

"Oh, yes, we saw him in the Hall," Arden exclaimed. "We forgot to tell you. There are no workmen tearing the place down now and Harry had it to himself."

"I wonder if he heard anything or saw anything," spoke Dorothy reflectively.

The doorbell rang. It gave them a sudden start.

"Wouldn't it be sort of—psychic if this was Harry now," exclaimed Sim.

"You should more properly say, 'if this were he, my dear young lady,'" corrected Arden, imitating one of their teachers at Cedar Ridge.

"School is out!" declared Sim. "Yes, Moselle?" she inquired.

"Mr. Pangborn," Moselle announced with dignity.

The girls looked at one another but didn't dare laugh. The sounds might carry downstairs.

"Oh, I wish he might come up here and let me hear what happened!" begged Terry as she saw her three friends rise as if to leave the room.

"I don't see why he can't," spoke Dorothy quickly. "You are quite 'decent,' as mother's theatrical friends say when they mean they are dressed enough to have gentlemen friends in their room—with plenty of chaperons," and she laughed gayly.

"Ask him to come up, Moselle!" Sim ordered with sudden decision.

Harry was not at all abashed by coming into a girl's room while she was reclining and with three other

pretty girls seated around her. Young Mr. Pangborn was not easily flustered. But he did look surprised.

"Well, what happened?" he inquired anxiously as he bowed to each one in turn and went over to Terry in the bed. "Did the bad old ghost get you?"

"Almost," she smiled as he took her hand. "Only it turned out to be a Santa Claus ghost; the real thing, too."

"Tell me," he begged.

They did.

Harry laughed. He absent-mindedly took out his cigarette case and then quickly put it back in his pocket, and almost as quickly took it out when Sim said: "You may."

"Well, I'm one up on you," he said to Terry and Arden.

"What do you mean?" Arden asked as he blew out a cloud of smoke.

"My ghost got away from me."

"No!"

"Really?"

"Did you see anything?"

This in turn from Arden, Sim, and Terry. Dorothy was getting him an ash tray.

"Oh, tell us!"

This came in a most proper Greek chorus.

"Well," he began, adjusting himself comfortably in the chair that gave him a view of all the girls, "I began my investigation at the ghost house this morning. Two of you were witnesses to that." He indicated Terry and Arden. They bowed in answer.

"I went all over the old place," the young millionaire resumed, "from cellar to what was left of the fourth floor. And I found nothing except the old furniture, the beds, a picture of a pretty girl in a green riding habit, and some old chests that were locked so I didn't open them. I understand they belong to Mrs. Howe."

"Yes," Arden said. "But didn't you find any secret passage, anything to explain how Jim Danton disappeared out of that closet and was found in the cellar? Didn't you discover the remains of the ghost of the old soldier, Nathaniel Greene—didn't you find any traces of Patience Howe?" breathlessly Arden demanded to know.

"Not a trace," and Harry shook his head. "I tried to find some secret passage out of that closet, but I couldn't. My only explanation is that Jim got mixed up and really fell down the big ash-chute. No, I really didn't find a thing."

"But you said," interposed Terry, "that you heard——"

"Yes. That's inexplicable. As I was tramping around the old place, pulling at loose boards here and there, suddenly, when I was in the room where, you say, a dead woman was seen on the bed, I heard the most unearthly groan, screech, yell, or scream. It was a combination of all four. It gave even me a start, I assure you," he admitted.

"What happened then?"

"What did you do?"

"Who screamed?"

"Didn't you discover anything?"

Dot joined in the questioning this time.

It was a big moment, and Harry was making the most of it.

What young man wouldn't have?

## CHAPTER XXI

### Rift in the Clouds

HARRY HELPED HIMSELF to another cigarette before he answered the barrage of inquiries.

"As nearly as I could tell," said the ghost-hunter, "the scream came from the room of the mysterious closet. At least, it sounded so to me. As I say, I was in the room where the old four-poster bed was."

"Where the workman said he saw the dead body," interposed Arden.

"Exactly. Well, I left that room on the jump, you may be sure, when I heard that terrible yell. I knew it hadn't come from the room where I was, and I headed for the closet room, as we'll call it."

The girls nodded their heads understandingly but did not interrupt.

"But there was nothing there," young Pangborn said. "Not a thing that could have screamed. There was nothing there. Absolutely!"

"Whatever did you do?" asked Terry, her eyes



brighter. Really, this was all so eerily interesting that she almost forgot the pain of her bandaged ankle.

"I just looked around," was the answer. "That horrible scream seemed to be still echoing through the big bare room, and to me it seemed to come up out of the ash-chute of the fireplace."

"That's what one of Jim's companions said," remarked Sim. "He said it sounded like a dying cat, and he dropped a brick down."

"If this was a cat it must have been a mountain lion," said Harry, seriously enough. "I've hunted them, and those catamounts do yell, groan, or scream in a most unearthly fashion at times. But there are none within many miles of here, unless one has escaped from a menagerie. Of course, that's possible."

"Do you think," asked Dot, examining one of her pink nails, "that it could be an animal who has been responsible for all the demonstrations?"

"What a fade-out for our ghosts!" murmured Sim.

"Not to be thought of!" declared Arden.

"I did have the idea of an animal for a moment," was the young man's answer. "But not after I investigated. I looked down the old ash-chute and even threw some pieces of bricks down. There was no come-back. Then I made another search of the old house, even

going down cellar and looking at the bottom of the chute, where, you say, Jim was found."

Arden nodded in confirmation.

"There was nothing there," went on the narrator, "not even a wild animal smell, which is very characteristic, I assure you. So I went outside and had a look around. I got positive evidence, then, that no one but myself had entered the house."

"How did you prove that?" pursued Terry.

"By the footprints in the snow. Or, rather, by a lack of footprints. The only marks were those I had made in entering and those Terry and Arden left, but they did not come near the house. So I knew that there was no one in the house with me."

"And yet you heard that terrible yell!" whispered Terry.

"Yes, I heard it. There was no mistake about it."

"What is your explanation?" asked Arden after a rather long pause.

Harry laughed, shrugged his shoulders, crushed his cigarette out on the tray Dot had brought him, and said:

"I haven't any! I'm as much up in the air as you girls are."

They were rather wide-eyed at hearing this.

"Of course," he went on, "this yell is the only manifestation that has come to me. I understand you girls have both seen and heard things."

"No." Arden shook her head. "We were never really in the house when anything actually happened. We would arrive on the scene after the men had run out, yelling that they had either seen or heard something. What they heard, so they said, was a scream like the one you describe. Also there was the sound of heavily booted feet tramping on the stairs. And I think one man said he saw what he thought was a soldier in one of the rooms. Then there was the figure on the bed. But we never saw either of those."

"And the last thing that happened," said Sim, "I mean just before what you heard this afternoon, Harry, was the disappearance of Jim and his subsequent discovery in the cellar."

"He said something hit him on the head," suggested Dot.

"Oh, yes, so he did," Arden recalled.

"Then," stated the young man, "we have three sorts of ghostly demonstrations: visible, audible, and manual; I might say, to describe the assault on Mr. Jim. It's very odd. I can't account for it. I was sure, after I heard that scream, that some prank-loving

chap had slipped into the house after me and was practising his college yell. But the snow told a different story."

They were silent a little while, and then Arden, in rather a small voice, asked:

"What are you going to do next, Harry?"

"I don't know. What do you want me to do?"

"Well, we'd like to have you help us find that ghost, if it's only to satisfy ourselves that there's no such thing," said Sim.

"And we want to help Granny Howe," suggested Terry. "It seems pathetic that her Sycamore Hall, or what she claims is her ancestors' manor house and ought to be hers, must be torn down, taken away, and she and the two grandchildren get nothing for it."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Pangborn. "Pass that, and I shall have something to say on it in a moment. But can I do anything else to help you? I'll say now, in between times of laying out the bird sanctuary, I'm going to keep after the ghost."

"There's one other thing," Arden said. "About Jim Danton's family. They are in want and he was hurt while working for that contractor."

"Oh, yes, I was going to tell you about that," Harry went on. "As I was coming away, after my unsuccess-

ful, mysterious-voice hunt, I met Mr. Callahan. I had in mind what you told me last night about this Jim, and I spoke about him. Callahan says he will see that he gets workman's compensation all the while he is ill. The contractor carries insurance."

"That's fine," exclaimed Arden. "Well, outside of finding the ghost, which perhaps we can't do, and helping Granny—which seems impossible——"

"Perhaps not quite as impossible as you think," interrupted the bird-sanctuary man with a smile, asking pardon for his interruption. "I talked with my friend Dr. Thandu over the telephone after I left here last night. I spoke of this case, the old ancestral hall being torn down and no compensation being paid to the evident heirs, Granny, Dick, and Betty."

"Dr. Thandu said it was a very complicated case. It appears when the state took over Jockey Hollow for a park Mrs. Howe and her grandchildren lived in the Hall. She had lived there many years and always supposed it was her property. But when, under the law known as the right of eminent domain, the state took it to make a Revolutionary memorial park, Mrs. Howe could produce no papers proving her claim. She never had occasion to use them, she said, and had no idea where they might be. She surmised that her father

or grandfather had put them away, but a diligent search failed to reveal them.

"Well, the state waited a long time, and then, as she could show no legal title, they asked her to move, which she did, as they were soon going to start tearing down the place. However, Dr. Thandu and his fellow commissioners did all they could. They had the Hall appraised and the money was paid into court. It is there now, and whoever can prove title to Sycamore Hall will get that money."

"It should go to Granny Howe, and possibly some of it to her cousin Viney," declared Arden, "and to Betty and Dick. Why doesn't the state or Dr. Thandu or somebody give it to them? It's doing no good where it is now!" Arden was indignant.

"Granted," said Harry. "But here is the point. Suppose the state paid this sequestered money to Granny Howe and her kin. Then, some time later, suppose the real heirs appeared with the legal papers and showed that the Hall was theirs. The state would have to pay all over again."

"I suppose they couldn't do that," agreed Sim a little sadly.

"That's why they have to be so careful," went on Mr. Pangborn. "It is a complicated matter. The state

doesn't want to cheat Granny, nor does it want to be cheated itself. But there is a rift in the clouds."

"Where?" asked Terry.

"Dr. Thandu is willing and will urge that the whole case be reopened. The Park Commission lawyers will go over it all again and take the matter to court, seeing if it is possible, even without the missing papers, to pay Mrs. Howe. And I may add that I am going to have my late grandfather's lawyers—the ones who posted that reward circular about me," he said with a smile to Arden—"I'm going to have them look into the case for Mrs. Howe. They are clever fellows. So perhaps it may all come right after all."

"Oh, I do hope so!" cried Arden. "And in this connection I've just had the most wonderful thought. I must tell you before I forget it. This is going to be a happy Christmas for Granny Howe. Now, this is my plan."

But before Arden could continue, there came a knock at the door.

## CHAPTER XXII

### Arden's Idea

AR DEN was on the verge of disclosing something when that knock sounded. So excited were the girls over what had happened and what Harry Pangborn had told them that, for a moment, they were startled.

Then Sim, the first, seemingly, to return to the very practical present, called:

"Come in!"

Moselle entered.

"'Scuse me," she said, "but the horse-boy is downstairs."

"The horse-boy?" repeated Sim.

"Do you mean somebody with a cold?" asked Arden mischievously glancing at Harry.

"No'm, Miss Arden. I means that boy you-all go riding with on horses."

"Oh, Dick Howel!" said Terry.

"Whom I have yet to have the pleasure of meeting," murmured Dot.

"What can he want?" murmured Sim.

"I wonder if anything could have happened to Granny—or at the Hall?" questioned Arden.

"Did he say what he wanted, Moselle?" Sim asked, and Moselle let her eyes rove about the room containing the four pretty girls and the very presentable Harry Pangborn. Perhaps Moselle wondered at a gentleman not a physician visiting in Terry's room, but the cook said nothing about that. She merely remarked:

"He didn't say what he wanted—just asked to see one of the young ladies."

"Which one?" asked Terry, laughing, for her ankle pain was much relieved by the comforting bandages and the liniment the doctor had used.

"He didn't say, Miss Terry, but I 'spects he meant Miss Sim."

"I'd better go down," Sim decided.

"I hope," remarked Arden as Sim started downstairs, "that Dick's call has nothing to do with Granny Howe being ill, or anything like that. What I was just going to tell you has to do with Granny."

"I had a glimpse of her near her little cottage as I was leaving the Hall," said Harry. "She seemed to be

all right, bustling about in the snow like some Colonial housewife. Very picturesque."

"Hurry back, Sim, and tell us," begged Dot. "I'm dying with curiosity, and if he's good-looking and young and all that sort of thing, he might come around oftener. You hinted there might be some young men when you asked me out for the holidays," she said, mischief again sparkling in her rather fascinating eyes.

"What do you call this nice young man?" Arden pointed a slim pink finger at Harry who bowed gallantly.

"One among four?" questioned Dot with upraised eyebrows.

"I know some chaps——" Harry began, but Arden interrupted with:

"Don't pay any attention to Dot. She's too theatrical."

Sim had gone down and was returning quickly.

"It wasn't anything," she reported. "Dick just wanted to know when we were going to ride again. He said business was rather slow at Ellery's, and it was Dick's idea to start out and drum up a little trade. He does get a commission, just as I expected. Shall we go riding again?"

"I'd love it!" Dot declared.

"But—Terry," Sim reminded them, going over to the bed and smoothing back the invalid's hair, rather movie-like.

"Oh, don't mind me!" Terry was quick to say. "I think a little rest and quiet will do me good. I shall probably doze off after my ride with Santa Claus, that was invigorating," and she laughed a little, just like herself.

"Well, what about it, girls?" asked Sim. "Dick is waiting for an answer. I think a ride would do us good. He says he'll bring the horses around here—he'll have another groom to help him."

"I'm not very favorably disposed toward Mr. Ellery after that talk I heard when Nick, or somebody, hinted that the liveryman had some underhand connection with the old Hall," spoke Arden. "It may have been nothing, but, somehow, I don't trust Mr. Ellery too far."

"You can't blame what he does or says, or anything that the mysterious Nick does, on the horses," Sim declared. "And it would mean something to Dick. Besides, I would like a ride. Why not?"

"I might come along as second groom," suggested Harry.

"Oh, please do!" begged Dorothy impulsively. She, as Sim said to Arden later, seemed fast making friends with the young man. Dorothy showed her mother's theatrical influence.

"Then I'll tell Dick to bring around four horses," decided Sim. "You're sure you won't mind, Terry?"

"Not a bit. But I do wish Arden would tell us the big secret before you go. I'll have something to think about, then, while you're gone."

"Oh, I think it will be the loveliest thing!" Arden said, her eyes shining with enthusiasm. "I'm so glad I thought of it. The idea came to me when Harry was telling about his plan, and the park commissioners, to give Granny more time to prove her claim—or to help her with legal advice or something like that. Anyhow, it looks like new hope for Granny. And what I suggest is that we give her a little party, say on Christmas Eve, and tell her the good news. I believe it will be the best present she could want."

"Say, that is an idea!" exclaimed Sim.

"Just like you, Arden," said Dot.

"Does that appeal to you, Harry?" Sim wanted to know.

"Splendid!"

"And my ankle will be enough better, then, so I can come to the party," Terry murmured.

"Would you have it here or at Granny's cottage?" Sim asked. "I think here would be nice, as we have the holly now."

"Why not have it in the Hall?" asked Dorothy. "I think that would be the most appropriate place for such an announcement."

"Good!" said Harry.

"But could we?" Sim asked. "I mean, wouldn't it be bleak and cold? The weather is likely to be stormy now for quite a while. It is still snowing."

"I love to ride in a snowstorm," was Dot's remark. "It would be just like one of those funny old melodramas, riding back home." Dorothy was best when she *was* theatrical.

"But about using the Hall for Granny's Christmas party," suggested Harry, "I think nothing could be nicer. And from what I saw of the place in my investigations today, I think that big lower room could be very well used for it. By keeping the windows and doors closed and building a big fire on the hearth it would be warm enough; simply swell. That hearth will take in a whole fence rail. Then there are some old tables, chairs, boxes, and chests scattered through the

old mansion that we could bring to that room and make it look like Christmas in the very old days. No trouble at all."

"Then we'll do it!" Sim decided. "Arden, you get the prize of a fur-lined Santa Claus suit in which to make the announcement to Granny!"

"Oh, won't it be fun!" sighed Terry. "How long until Christmas?" and she began to count on her fingers. The ankle was now being all but forgotten.

"Then we'll regard it as settled," said Arden. "I'm so glad I thought of this, and so glad you mentioned having it in the Hall, Dot. Things are looking distinctly brighter; in fact, they begin to shine!"

"In spite of the fact that we haven't solved the mystery," added Sim.

"But we shall!" predicted Harry. "I'm going to be around here for some time after Christmas on that bird-sanctuary business, and the mystery is going to be solved before the birds settle down."

"Let us help," suggested Arden. "Don't forget we had 'firsties,'" she finished, dimpling like a little girl.

"I'll let you help, gladly," Harry answered. "In fact, I'm counting on it."

"Well, if we're going riding, let's go!" proposed Sim. "Poor Dick is waiting. Probably he wants the

commission he'll get out of our business to buy Christmas presents with."

The girls scurried out to get into riding togs. Harry Pangborn was wearing what would be all right for his ride as the rig had been chosen for his woodland work. He looked well in windbreaker coat, cap, leather puttees, and his knickers were genuine Scotch plaid.

Sim, before going to dress, sent Moselle to tell Dick to bring around four horses and then supplied Terry with books to read in bed while she would be alone.

"Sure you won't be lonesome?" Sim asked, smoothing down the spread.

"Not at all. I shall probably read myself to sleep," Terry promised.

Dick and a younger helper were soon back with the mounts, and they all started gayly out in the snow, which was falling faster than ever. But it was a dry, fine snow that did not melt on one's garments or get in wet around one's neck. Even the horses seemed to like it; this friendly snow.

"Which way shall we take?" asked Sim as they started out.

"Let's go round by way of the Hall and—have a look at the prospects," suggested Arden, warning her companions with a look not to say too much about

Granny's Christmas party before Dick. The details were to be a sort of surprise, though the old lady might have to be told that the young people wanted to use that one big room in her former home for a little festivity. The Hall being locally famous, that arrangement would be reasonable enough.

"We can bring Granny over from her cottage at the last minute," Arden had said when discussing this angle of it.

"There's nothing doing at the Hall now," said Dick when the horses had been turned in the direction of Jockey Hollow.

"What do you mean?" asked Sim.

"I mean Callahan has called all the work off."

"Why is that?" Arden wanted to know.

"Perhaps new and worse ghosts," suggested Dorothy quizzically.

"No, that isn't it," the young groom answered. "I believe he couldn't get the right kind of men to work, it's so near Christmas. They would work half a day and then want to stop. I didn't hear anything more about the ghosts—not since my sister found what she thought was a dead man in the cellar," and Dick laughed, recalling that incident.

"That certainly was something to find," murmured



Arden. "Poor Betty! She was so frightened. I'll never forget how she shook."

"She's all over it now, though," her brother declared. "But it did give her quite a shock. She talked about it a lot afterwards. No, I don't believe in that ghost business myself. It's just a lot of tricks those workmen think funny," he suggested boyishly.

"Tell him about the scream you heard, Harry," suggested Dorothy to the young man she was riding beside. As if *that* might change Dick's opinion.

"No, I think I'd better not," Harry answered. "I want to find that screamer first. *Then*, I'll tell the big story."

They broke into a brisk canter. It was a splendid ride in the friendly snow, and in due time they reached the old Hall.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dick as he saw the now almost obliterated footprints leading into the mansion. "Somebody has been here after all. I wonder if any of the men can be working, after what Callahan told me?"

"Probably just some curiosity-seeker went in," suggested Harry with a warning look at the girls. "Only one man, according to footprints," he said.

"I guess that's right," Dick agreed. "Well, it

shouldn't worry me. This place doesn't belong in our family any more." He could not repress a little sigh of regret as they rode on past the historic place that had been in the possession of the Howes so many years.

"How does this ghost business affect your grandmother's cousin, Mrs. Tucker?" asked Arden of Dick.

"Oh, Cousin Viney? She just laughs at it. Doesn't believe in it at all. She's bitter, though, at us losing the place. Rants about the carelessness of some ancestor who either lost the deeds or else hid them so well neither he nor anybody else was ever able to find them—deeds, a missing will, or whatever papers are called for in a case like this," Dick said, a little confused in attempting to make that complicated speech.

"So Cousin Viney doesn't believe in ghosts?" asked Harry in an offhand sort of way.

"No more than Granny does. Anyhow, Cousin Viney is away now. She goes and comes, visiting around among various relatives. She went away this morning—didn't say when she would come back."

"It's just as well," said Sim to Dot. "Then we won't have to ask her to Granny's little party. And I don't like Cousin Viney very much, anyhow."

"She did rather give me the creeps," Dot said, "so sharp and 'sassy.'"

They rode on into Jockey Hollow while the snowflakes continued to sift down upon them, almost hiding the ghostly Hall behind a thin, shifting, white curtain.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## Mistletoe

THERE were many historic spots in Jockey Hollow. Arden had found out some facts from the library book, and Dick knew others gleaned in various ways. As they rode along they talked about it all.

Dick pointed out rows of chimney stones where once had stood the log huts that housed the 10,000 men of Washington's army camped in the Hollow that winter of 1779. Washington himself had a mansion in a near-by town long famous in history, Dick took pleasure in reminding them.

Dick located a grove of locust trees, shrouded now in white where, he said, several hundred men of the unfortunate Continental Army had died and were buried along the banks of Primrose Brook which now was frozen over and covered with downy snow.

"Well, when they get the park laid out and finished," suggested Arden, "I suppose they'll put up a

bronze tablet somewhere around here to commemorate the valiant men."

"A pity they can't keep the old Hall standing. That would be a fine monument," suggested Sim. "It could be a memorial hall."

"The Hall is doomed," said Dick sadly. "We have given up all hope." He urged his horse ahead briskly.

"He doesn't know what you are going to tell Granny!" whispered Dorothy to Harry.

"I hope something comes of it," he remarked in a low voice. "At least, the whole matter will be thoroughly gone over, and if there is anything in her claim, and any money due her that can be paid, my lawyers will arrange it. They are smart men, I am sure of that."

It was almost dark when the riders returned to Sim's house. Dick and the other groom went back with the horses. The ride had been enjoyable for all of them.

"Don't forget to let me know when you want to go out again," Dick called with gay freedom. "If I can get money enough for an education out of my commissions from Ellery, that will be fine," he suggested as he rode happily away.

Terry was eagerly waiting for her friends when they got back.

"What, no ghosts?" she exclaimed when they trooped in to tell her of their ride.

"Not a ghost—not even scolded by Viney Tucker. She should have told us that we rode too long," laughed Arden. "Viney, by the way, is out of the way."

"Where?" Terry asked.

"Off visiting, so Dick says. Oh, but I'm hungry!" cried Sim. "Where is Moselle? You'll stay to dinner, of course, Harry?"

"Thanks, but I'm afraid I can't. I want to get in touch with the lawyers on the telephone, and Dr. Thandu, to make sure that there will be no hitch in the plans for Granny's Christmas party. And I shall probably need to put in calls and wait for answers. I'd be jumping up from the table off and on. No, I'll go back to the hotel. I can phone nicely from there. But I'll keep this invitation in reserve, if I may."

"Of course. Any time. This will keep."

Terry's ankle was much improved by morning, though the doctor said she must not yet step on it.

"In another day you may be able to hobble about the house on a cane," he had said.

"She will be an invalid with a most interesting limp," declared Dot.

That day Harry telephoned to say that matters connected with the legal aspects of Granny's case were coming along most satisfactorily.

"You will be able to assure her at the Christmas party," he told Arden, "that she has the best chance she ever had to get something out of the estate. At any rate, if we fail, she will have the satisfaction of knowing that all that could be done has been done."

"And if it fails," asked Arden, "will she and the young folks have to give up hope?"

"I'm afraid so. But it's better to give up a hope than to have it linger forever, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. Oh, I do hope it turns out all right!"

"So do I."

Arden, who happened to answer the telephone to take the message from Harry, reported to the other girls, and Sim said:

"I think we ought to go over to the Hall and see whether Harry's idea of a warm and cozy room can be carried out in this cold spell."

"Not a bad idea," agreed Arden.

"Oh, I wish I could go!" sighed Terry, looking at her bandaged foot.

"Don't chance it!" warned Dorothy. "You'll want to be at the party. I'll stay here with you, Terry, if Arden and Sim want to prance down to the Hall and look it over."

"Let's, Sim!" Arden exclaimed. "Only we won't prance. We'll go in the car."

To this Sim agreed and, the housekeeping plans for the day having been disposed of, she and Arden started out in the sturdy little roadster. It had stopped snowing, and the sun was shining brightly with a dazzling luster on the white ground. It was snappy and cold, so the girls wore furs and arctics, for they wanted to walk around near the Hall. That opportunity always fascinated them.

Reaching the Hall, they tramped up the steps. Sim and Arden pushed open the heavy front door and stood with their heads just within the hall, listening before venturing in all the way.

"No use taking any chances," Sim remarked.

"What chances?" Arden asked, though, as a matter of fact, the same thought was in her own mind.

"Well, ghosts or some irresponsible workmen who might be camping out in here since they had the last séance."

"Or tramps," suggested Arden.

"Say, there's a thought!" Sim exclaimed. "Perhaps *tramps* have been creating all this disturbance."

"Why would they?" Arden was discounting her own suggestion.

"A band or bunch or school or congregation—whatever group tramps fit into—might have picked this place as hide-out, hang-out, or rendezvous, or whatever the proper term is," said Sim, laughing. "And they might object to being dispossessed in the winter. They might even have hit upon the plan of making ghostly noises and manifestations to scare away the workmen. Then, if their scheme worked, they would be left in peaceful possession."

"But *we* didn't find any tramps here," objected Arden. "And Harry didn't find any. And surely they would have piled back in here after the workmen had gone—if there is a gang of tramps playing tricks."

"Well, maybe I'm wrong," Sim admitted. "Anyhow, there seems to be no one in here now, so let's have a look at the room where we are to have Granny's Christmas party. I'm game."

The old Hall echoed weirdly to their footsteps, echoes that always seemed to dwell in untenanted houses. But the girls were not nervous. They were only going into that one room which was close to the

entrance, and if anything happened they could run out quickly.

But nothing happened. There were no screams, not even a sigh, except that of the wind. There were no thumping boots coming down the stairs and no rustling red cloaks.

"I think we can very nicely use this room," said Arden, looking around the big long double parlor containing the immense fireplace and the picture of Patience Howe. "It can be closed off from the rest of the house. Not a window or a door has been broken."

"And with a roaring fire on the hearth," added Sim, "we shall be quite cozy here. Anyhow, we shan't be here very long. But I think your idea of telling Granny the good news here is just wonderful!"

"Thanks," murmured Arden. "I hope it is a spectacular success."

They did not wander through any other part of the house to see if they could collect enough chairs or other pieces of furniture for seats. They took it for granted that they could manage other details, and then, having made sure that the old chimney was unobstructed—they looked up and could see daylight—so the fire would not smoke, they finally left.

"Let's walk around a bit," suggested Arden.

"Why not?" agreed Sim. "Walking around here is our greatest outdoor sport."

They were well clothed and shod for tramping in the snow, so they began a circuit of the strange mansion. There was no sign, anywhere, that anyone but themselves had entered since Harry Pangborn made his investigation the day before.

They walked down what had once been a lane, arbores with grapevines and hedged in now with ugly tall weeds that thrust themselves up through the snow. In the distance were some gnarled trees and a small stone building. They had not noticed it before, but now, against the white ground, it stood up boldly.

"I wonder what that is?" asked Sim.

"Let's go see," suggested Arden.

They passed into the little grove of apple trees, Arden remarking how much some of them resembled those in the strange orchard at Cedar Ridge. Then she suddenly uttered a cry of delight.

"What is it?" Sim asked.

"Mistletoe!"

"No! Really?"

"I think so. Anyhow, it's some sort of a bush with white berries on. Look!"

"It does seem like mistletoe," agreed Sim. "But I thought that was found only down South."

"I thought so too. But, anyhow, we can pretend this is mistletoe, it looks so much like it," laughed Arden.

"Why should we want to pretend? Let's be bold and say it *is* mistletoe!"

"Moselle might know the difference. But I'm with you to the hilt, comrade! Mistletoe it is!" Arden began quickly to gather the white-berried branches which, fortunately, broke off, making it unnecessary to cut them, which the girls couldn't have done, as they had brought no knife.

Sim was pulling at a particularly large branch when they were suddenly startled by hearing the creaking of a door on rusty hinges. Then a voice, almost snarling in its tones, called loudly:

"What are you doing here?"

Arden and Sim had walked along until they were close to the small old stone house. But they were so interested in gathering the mistletoe that they had not noticed the slow opening of the door.

Then came the challenge.

The girls swung about in startled fear and heard the rasping voice demand again:

"What are you doing here?"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A Strange Woman

IN REAL PANIC, Arden and Sim wheeled about, dropping some of the branches they had treasured. Fairly glaring at them from the small stone building was Viney Tucker. She wore a heavy black cloak and had on a black bonnet from the edges of which had escaped several wisps of straggling gray hair. What a startling picture she presented!

"What do you want here?" she asked again.

"Oh, how do you do!" greeted Sim, though the words were rather shaky. She had heard about the queer cousin from the other girls and felt she knew Viney well enough not to be afraid of her.

"I'm as well as I ever expect to be," was the somewhat ungracious answer, and she gave the old bonnet a vicious tug.

"We thought you were away," Arden told her kindly.

"Who told you that?" she snapped.

"Dick."

"Hum! Young folks know too much nowadays. It was different in my time. Then children were seen and not heard!"

"Do you—do you object to us taking some of this mistletoe?" asked Arden.

"Mistletoe! That isn't mistletoe, though lots of folks think it is. No, I can't say I object. This place isn't anybody's now. Do as you like. Turn out the rightful owners!" Her voice was vindictive.

"We aren't turning anyone out." Sim tried to make her voice very gentle. Really she felt sorry for the old lady, who did not seem to have the resigned spirit of Granny Howe.

"Well, the state is doing it, and you're part of the state, aren't you? I am, so you must be."

"Yes, I suppose we can call ourselves citizens of the state," admitted Arden.

"Well, the state is turning me and my cousin out of our property. Making a park of it for folks to ride horses in and birds to feed in. Bah! Don't talk to me! The state! I'd state 'em if I had my way!"

"Please don't blame us," urged Sim. "We really would love to help you and Granny Howe get money for this place and perhaps——"

"Ahem!" coughed Arden loudly.

"Better get back home where you belong, not out here catching cold!" snapped Viney Tucker. "Terrible weather! I hate snow!"

"I guess she hates everything and everybody," thought Arden.

The strange old woman stood in the open doorway of the old stone building. From the footprints in the snow the girls could easily guess that she had recently entered it. Also it was plain that she had come from over a distant hill and not from Granny Howe's cottage, which nestled in a little hollow about a quarter of a mile back of the old Hall.

"Then you don't mind if we take some of this mistletoe?" asked Sim, after a pause.

"No! Why should I? You can settle with the *state*," and she laughed scornfully. "It doesn't belong to my folks any more. Only don't call it *mistletoe*."

"What is it?" asked Sim.

"How should I know? I'm not a botanist or a bird-sanctuary teacher."

Really Viney Tucker must have arisen from the wrong side of her bed that morning, Sim reflected. She surely was cross.

"So you didn't go away?" asked Arden, wondering what the next move would be.

"Yes, I did. Went to stay with Sairy Pendleton. But she and I never could get along, so I came back. I came out here to the old smokehouse to get away from everybody. Folks get on my nerves—more than often! This old smokehouse sort of sets me up—better than the perfume you girls use. Bah!"

Sim and Arden were aware of a distinctly smoky odor floating out to them above the head of Viney Tucker. They were aware, now, of the use to which the small stone building had formerly been put. In the old days hams and bacon were cured there over a fire of hickory branches and corncobs, and that smoky smell always remained. It was a curious whim of the old lady to come there for solitude; surely lonely and uncanny.

"Well, if you've got all that wrongly called mistletoe you want," Viney Tucker suggested after rather an awkward pause, "you might as well take yourselves back home so you won't catch cold."

"Won't you catch cold, staying out in this bleak place?" asked Sim.

"No. I never catch cold. It's only this soft new generation that catches colds. Silly of 'em. Good-bye!"



She popped back into the smokehouse and closed the door.

Sim and Arden stood there, looking at each other in astonishment.

"Come on," Sim whispered after a pause. "We have enough—mistletoe and smokehouses."

"Yes," Arden agreed. "Let's go."

"And enough of such a strange woman," added Sim as they walked away from the smokehouse.

"She is strange," Arden agreed. "But I feel sorry for her."

"So do I, in a way. But I feel a lot more sorry for Granny Howe. She takes it standing up. This creature whines and moans."

"She does," Arden admitted. "But different people have a different way of taking adversity. Granny is sweet and serene."

"And Viney Tucker is bitter—but not sweet. Oh, well, it takes all sorts to make a world. This will be something to tell Terry and Dot, won't it?"

"Indeed it will."

"I wonder why she comes to such a lonesome smelly place as the old smokehouse to brood over her troubles?"

"It must bring back the days when she was a girl,"

suggested Arden. "I've heard my father, who was born on a farm, tell how they used to smoke hams and bacon in a little house like that one." She looked back toward it. There was no sign of Viney Tucker. She had shut herself in the strange place. "Probably," went on Arden, "Viney used to help smoke the hams out here. They must have had a delicious flavor."

"Not like the chemically prepared hams *we* have to eat," Sim surmised. "Moselle was saying, only yesterday, that she wished she had a Smithfield razor-back ham to bake with cloves for Christmas."

"Maybe Mrs. Tucker could supply one," suggested Arden.

"I wouldn't ask her."

"No, I don't believe it would be wise. But isn't it queer of her to go off visiting, and then return and go sit out in an old smokehouse?"

"Very queer," agreed Sim.

Carrying their "mistletoe," the girls went back to their parked car. As they were passing the Hall, they noticed the front door was closed as they had left it. There were no footprints in the snow other than those they themselves had made.

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Arden as they were at the edge of the sagging old front porch.

"What?" asked Sim.

"Didn't you hear a noise?"

"Where?"

They stood still and listened.

There was no doubt of it. Echoing footsteps were coming from the old mansion. Faint but unmistakable. They floated out of one of the upper windows, the frame of which had been torn away by the wreckers.

"Someone is in there!" whispered Sim.

"Well, they can stay there for all I'll ever do to get them out!" gasped Arden. "Come on!"

They ran back to the car, not pausing to listen any further.

Tossing their branches into the rumble seat, the two girls climbed into the roadster. Sim's trembling foot pressed the starter switch.

"Oh, I'm so glad it went off with a bang like that," she murmured as the motor chugged into service. Steering rather wildly, Sim shot up the hill and out upon the main road and away from Jockey Hollow.

"What do you think it was?" asked Arden when they had their hearts and breaths under control.

"Haven't the least idea."

"We must tell Harry."

"Of course. He may be able to figure out how

noises can come from an old house when there isn't a single mark in the snow to show that anyone has entered."

"The scream happened that same way; no one went in, but the scream came out, he said."

"Oh, it's all so mysterious!" sighed Sim. "Shall we ever be able to solve it? Seems to me it gets worse."

"I hope we can solve it," said her companion solemnly.

They created quite a sensation when they reached Sim's house, not only with the "mistletoe," over which Dot went into wild raptures, but with their story of Viney Tucker and the strange noises.

"What a queer old woman," said Dorothy. "I wouldn't want to meet her alone in the dark."

"Oh, I guess she's just a poor old crank whose troubles have gotten the best of her," said Arden. "I feel sorry for her."

"She must be a trial to Granny Howe," suggested Terry, who seemed much improved.

"Granny isn't the sort that gives way to trials," said Sim. "Oh, it will be so wonderful if we can help her!"

"Leave it to Harry," said Arden. "And, by the way, don't you think we had better tell him the latest happening?"

"Of course," said Dorothy quickly. "Shall I telephone him?"

"Why—er—yes," said Sim slowly, with a quick look at Arden and Terry.

"I'll tell him to come over to dinner, shall I?" Her eyes were shining.

"Yes," said Sim, smiling a little. "Harry is always welcome."

"And if he can make anything out of this latest development," said Arden, "he's a wonder."

"I think he's quite wonderful anyway," said Terry, snuggling a little deeper down in the bed. "Wasn't he grand when he let us give him up and collect the reward?"

"Them was the happy days!" laughed Arden.

"I'm going to phone," called Dot from the hall.

## CHAPTER XXV

### The Christmas Party

HARRY PANGBORN came over to dinner and to spend the evening. It was a most delightful meal, for Moselle and Althea had done their best, which was very good indeed. But it was the talk, the banter and laughter that lent spice to the food. Young folks are inimitable at that sort of thing.

"It certainly is mystifying," Harry had to admit when he was told, more in detail, what Dot had sketched to him over the telephone about the "mistle-toe" experience of Sim and Arden. "Very strange. You say there was no more sign of other footprints than your own?"

"Not a sign," declared Sim.

"Could you gather why Viney Tucker was in the old smokehouse?"

"Only that it was a queer whim," said Arden, "and she is queer."

"Yes, such a character as hers would be whimsy." He lighted a cigarette. Dinner was almost over.

"Is this mistletoe?" asked Dot, bringing out a branch from those her chums had gathered. "You might know, being a bird man."

"I should think one would need to be a ladies' man to judge mistletoe," said Mr. Pangborn, with a laugh and a glance at each of the girls in turn. Terry was downstairs for the first time since her accident.

"Not bad! Not half bad!" laughed Arden. "But do you confirm Viney's denial? Is it or is it not—mistletoe?"

"No, it isn't mistletoe," he said after an examination. "But I suppose it will answer the same purpose. Where are you going to hang it? I should like to know in advance."

"*Wouldn't* you like to know?" mocked Dorothy.

"I must take a piece with me and put it in Granny Howe's hair the night of the Christmas party," said Harry, handing back to Dot the plant she had given him. "I shall claim the privilege on the eve of the holiday."

"Like this?" Dot challenged with mischief in her eyes as she thrust the clump of white berries into her own blonde hair and then ran laughing from the room.

It was a merry little group. Mr. Pangborn said everything was in readiness to announce to Granny, with the sanction of the head of the State Park Commission, that at least she would have a new chance to prove her claim.

"And about the party," suggested Arden. "Just what are we going to do at it?"

"We shall need some refreshments, I suppose," said Sim. "I can get Moselle to arrange about that. We can pack them into my car and take them to the Hall. Only we'll be a bit crowded in the roadster."

"I'll bring my car," Harry said. "But, as there are quite a few things to do, wouldn't it be wise to take Dick and Betty into our confidence?"

"And let them help," spoke Terry.

"Yes. Dick and I can get in the wood and put the chairs and other furniture in place. I saw a table there for the food," said Harry.

"Oh, it's going to be just—*grand!*" murmured Sim dramatically.

"But tell Betty and Dick not to let Granny know about it," warned Arden. "That would spoil the surprise."

"I'll caution them," Harry promised. "I'll go see Dick at the livery stable in the morning and also stop

at the library and tell Betty. I've been in there for books before."

"What about Viney?" asked Sim. "Should she be told?"

"I'll leave that to Dick and Betty," said Harry. "They can use their best judgment. I only hope she doesn't break up the little affair. She's very queer, you say?"

"More than queer—vindictive," declared Arden.

"But when she hears the big state news, things are going to ease up a little, I think," said Sim.

They talked over the plan, made some changes, and when Harry left that evening all details were practically settled.

He telephoned the next day, about noon, to say that he had seen Betty and Dick and that they were delighted with the matter. They both said, Harry reported, that Viney must be told or she might break out into a sudden tantrum at the last moment when she learned about it.

"She probably won't come to the party," Harry said. Betty had informed him, but that would be all right, he added. The two grandchildren would escort Mrs. Howe to the old mansion the evening of the affair, at

a predetermined hour, on pretense that it would probably be the last Christmas she would ever see with the old house standing.

It was the day before Christmas. Dick and Harry, with the help of a stable boy, had brought much dry wood into the old Hall. The girls had, each one, bought some little token for Granny and something for Viney, "in case," Arden said, "she shows up at the last moment and starts a fuss. We'll have to treat her like a child."

Betty and Dick entered into the spirit of the affair and could not say enough in praise of the girls who had thought of it.

"Granny is going to be very happy about it all," said Betty gratefully.

"I hope so," said Arden. "By the way, Betty, did you ever get those old books you were looking for in the cellar?"

"I never did. But I'm going in when the house is razed. It will be light down there then. There may be some valuable volumes, the librarian says."

In the days that passed between the one before Christmas and the episode of the "mistletoe," nothing had happened at Sycamore Hall, as far as Arden and

her chums could learn. There were no more strange manifestations. But then no workmen were engaged in tearing the place apart.

Dick and Betty decided not to say anything to Viney Tucker until the afternoon of the party. Otherwise she might have too long a time to brood over it and get some obstreperous notions busy in her old bonnet.

All the preparations were finished. Moselle had made up a delightful picnic lunch for an evening supper, with thermos bottles of coffee and chocolate. The things were taken to the Hall by Harry in his car, and a hearth fire was lighted early in the afternoon to drive the chill off the big old room.

Evening came, and after an early meal the girls and Harry went, in two carloads, to the old Hall. Candles had been brought for illumination, and there was quite a collection of flashlights for emergencies.

"Then Arden, her chums, and Harry trooped into the place. More wood was piled on the fire. The hour approached when Dick and Betty were to bring in Granny Howe.

Footsteps were heard on the porch—voices—laughter.

"What in the world are you tykes up to?" Granny

could be heard asking of Betty and Dick. Her voice was jovial.

They brought in the dear old lady—into the candle-lighted room, where the roaring fire flickered on branches of holly that the girls, with a last moment thought, had hung around the walls.

"Oh—what—what is all this?" faltered Granny as she saw the little throng of happy, smiling faces. "What does it mean?"

"Merry Christmas, Granny! Merry Christmas!" cried the girls.

And Granny, trembling a little, took the old squat rocker before the hearth fire while the merry throng cheered around her.

This was indeed a Christmas party!

## CHAPTER XXVI

### Two Ghosts

SEVERAL rather tense seconds passed after the jolly holiday greetings before Granny Howe recovered her usual poise. The smile that had been on her cheery face when Dick and Betty led her into the fire-warmed and candlelighted room of the old mansion, and she had seen the merry young people, faded as she sank into the rocker. There was a puzzled expression in her eyes.

"Well, Granny," asked Betty, "don't you like it?"

"Pretty fine, if you ask me," said Dick.

"Oh, but what does it all mean?" murmured the old lady. "I can't understand. They told me," she went on, looking from Betty to Dick, "that someone here wanted to see me. They suggested it might be the last time I could view this dear old room, as the contractor would probably rush the work of tearing the house down after Christmas. So I came. Here I am. But what does it mean?" She was bewildered.

"We are the ones who wanted to see you, Granny Howe," said Sim.

"We thought you would like a last little party in your old home," said Terry, who managed to get along with only a slight limp now. "And here it is!" She pulled aside a cloth that had been put over the food piled on an old table.

"How kind of you," Granny said. There was a suspicious brightness in her eyes.

"But it is going to be more than just a little party," spoke Arden. "We have some good news for you."

"News," supplemented Dorothy, "which we hope will make your Christmas very happy." Doubtless Dorothy felt that, like some of her actress mother's experiences, this was a sort of play and all the actors must contribute a line.

"What news?" faltered Granny Howe.

"Mr. Pangborn will tell you!" said Arden, pushing Harry forward, for he had shifted about until he was behind Dorothy. "It was his idea, and he must have the credit for it."

"Oh, nonsense! I don't want any credit. And you girls are as much in it as I am!" Harry protested. "You tell her, Arden!"

"No. It requires a man's legal mind to go into the

details. Go on, Harry. Can't you see she is on the verge of a breakdown if you keep her in suspense much longer?" she whispered. Indeed, the old lady was trembling more than a little. Dick, too, seemed a little uncertain of what the next move was to be. But Betty's eyes were very bright. Sim, Terry, and Dorothy were smiling happily.

"It will not take long to explain," said Harry. Then, as simply as he could, he related the offer of the Park Commission. In effect it meant a much better chance than Granny Howe had ever had to prove her claim, assisted by the best legal minds that could be engaged.

"Isn't that a wonderful Christmas present, Granny!" cried Betty. "Now perhaps we shall get something from the estate and I can finish my studies instead of slaving in that musty library. And Dick, too! He can go to college now!"

"Does it really mean," asked Dick, "that we will get some of the money the state has set aside for the purchase of the old Howe property in Jockey Hollow?"

"I think you are pretty certain to get something," said Harry. "It may take considerable time—it's a complicated legal matter—but at least you are going

to have your day in court, which you never had before."

There was silence a moment, and Granny, looking from one to another, said gently:

"It is kind of you—more kind than I can appreciate now. I'm all in a flutter!" She laughed a little. "But I have for so long a time given up hope that now I don't just know how to get hopeful again. I don't want to discourage any of you, especially Mr. Pangborn, for I realize all he has done in getting this concession from the Park Commission. But doesn't it all hinge on the fact that papers—deeds, wills, or something—are necessary for me to prove my claim?"

"Yes, I suppose it would be much easier if you had the missing papers," said Harry. "But I understand they cannot be found, so we must do the best we can without them."

"They have been lost for many years," sighed Granny. "With them to prove my claim and the claims of my grandchildren, everything would be easy. Years ago I used to hunt day and night in this old house for those papers, for I always felt they must be hidden here. But I have given up that hope—long ago."

Suddenly a change came over Granny Howe. She



arose from the rocker and with a bright smile exclaimed:

"Now, enough of this! I am going to get back my hope! I thank you all from the bottom of my heart—you have been wonderful! I must not be gloomy and doubtful! Wasn't something said about a party?" she went on with a bright glance at Arden. "And all the parties I ever attended were jolly affairs. This must be the same!"

"Hurrah for Granny!" cried Sim. "Now, on with the food!"

Then the party really did begin, and in the intervals of eating, talking, and piling more wood on the blaze, Harry sketched what he thought the probable legal action would be. He offered to take charge for Granny, and his offer was accepted with grateful thanks.

"I suppose," he suggested to the old lady, "that you can't throw any light on the so-called ghostly happenings here?"

"Not the least in the world," laughed Granny. "None of them ever happened in my sight or hearing. I just don't believe them. Though, I suppose, there must be something queer, for there are many stories dating back a long time. And surely those workmen

wouldn't act as they did unless something happened. And that one poor man wouldn't purposely slide down an ash-chute, I think. But it's all a mystery to me."

"Do you know any more stories about the place you haven't told us?" asked Arden. "I mean a sort of ghost story that isn't about Patience Howe or Nathaniel Greene?"

"I might manage to remember one," smiled Granny.

"Oh, do tell us!" begged Terry and Sim.

Dorothy was on the outer edge of the little circle about Granny, who sat near the crackling fire. Harry had wandered to a distant window, and Dorothy followed him.

"Are you game?" she whispered to him.

"For what?"

"To go and look for a ghost instead of sitting here listening to stories about one. Come on! I dare you!" she challenged, her eyes sparkling in the hearth glow. "We each can take a flashlight. Let's slip away while the others are listening to Granny tell that story, and see if there isn't a real ghost on some of the upper floors. Night and Christmas Eve ought to be a proper time for a ghost, hadn't it? Will you come with me?"

"I will!" said Harry without a moment of hesitation.

They slipped out of the room, attracting no attention, and, flashing the beams of their electric torches ahead of them, walked softly up the broad stairs. It was cold and gloomy away from the gay Christmas room, but they did not mind. The spirit of the quest was upon them.

They walked the length of the long upper halls. In a far corner of the second one, where the work of demolition had not started, half hidden by old boards and trash, stood a cedar chest.

"Perhaps," said Dorothy with a nervous little laugh, "the ghost lies in there. If it were a closet we might look for the skeleton. But let's have a look, anyhow."

Harry raised the lid, which was covered with dust and white plaster dust. Dorothy flashed her light within. Then she uttered a suppressed scream. For the first glance seemed to show in the chest the body of a woman clad in a red cloak resting beside the form of a Continental soldier with high black boots.

"The ghosts!" murmured Dorothy.

"No, only their garments!" said Harry, laughing. "But I think, Dot, that at last we are on the trail of the mystery!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

### Frightened Screams

HARRY tilted the lid of the chest back against the wall, and with both hands now free was thus able to flash the beams of his torch into the box, which was what Dorothy also was doing. The double illumination revealed other garments in the long narrow box. Henry lifted out the old Continental soldier uniform—coat, trousers, a hat, and the heavy boots.

"They have been worn recently," he said. "Not much dust on them."

"And the cloak?" asked Dorothy in a tense voice.

"That, also, has very little dust on it," he said, lifting it out.

Then a daring project came into Dorothy's mind.

"I dare you," she said, "to dress up as the old soldier—just the coat, hat, and boots—and walk with me, in masquerade, into the room where Granny is telling a ghost story. I'll put on the red cloak—and this!"

She reached in and lifted from the chest a white kerchief and a sort of tam-o'-shanter cap.

"Let's be two live ghosts," she proposed. "It will be a fitting end to the Christmas party, and then—well, you said you thought we were near the end of the ghost trail."

"I really believe we are. Somebody has been using these garments to create all this ghost atmosphere in the old Hall. Dorothy, I'll take your dare, and after we have had our fun we will start a new investigation and try to find out who has been responsible for all this."

"This is going to be good!" murmured the girl, a natural actress, as she threw the red cloak about her shoulders after adjusting the kerchief as it might have been worn in Colonial days, crossed on her breast. With the cap jauntily askew on her head, she looked very like the reputed ghost of Patience Howe.

Harry slipped off his shoes, put on the heavy boots, donned the coat and hat, and they were ready. With flashlights held out in front of them to illuminate the dark hall, they started for the lower room whence faintly floated up the laughter following Granny Howe's story.

"It's time we started back," whispered Dorothy. "They will miss us in another moment."

They were near the head of the stairs when, suddenly, the door of a room opened slightly and a light gleamed through the crack. It was the room containing the mysterious closet from which Jim Danton had so strangely vanished, to be found in the cellar.

The door opened wider. Then an old woman, an old woman with a wrinkled face and straggling gray hair, looked out. In one hand she held a small flashlight.

She glared at Harry and Dorothy in their masquerade costumes, and then a look of deadly fear came over her face. She uttered several wild and piercing screams and turned back into the room, still gibbering and gasping.

A second later there was the sound of something wooden moving inside the room—a sound followed by a resounding blow, as though the heavy lid of a chest had fallen.

Another wild scream and then silence.

"Oh!" gasped Dorothy. "What is it? Who is she?"

"Must be that Viney Tucker, cousin of Granny's," exclaimed Harry. "But what was she doing up here?"

We must have frightened the wits out of her. And I'm afraid something has happened."

He hurried into the room, followed by Dorothy. The closet door was open and their lights, flashing within it, revealed a square hole in the floor—a square hole opening into a smooth wooden chute that curved downward and into the darkness. And from that darkness now came up faint moans.

"This is awful!" cried Dorothy. "What have we done?"

"We haven't done anything, but I think we have made a big discovery!" said Harry. "This trapdoor explains how Jim got into the cellar and I think that's where we'll now find Mrs. Tucker. She has been caught in her own trap!"

By this time the Christmas guests in the room below had come running out with their flashlights, calling up to know what was going on.

Harry hurried down the stairs, followed by Dorothy.

"The ghosts!" screamed Terry, pointing a trembling finger at them.

"No!" Harry shouted for he wanted to prevent any more hysterical outbursts. "It's just a little joke

Dorothy and I started, but I'm afraid it is far from a joke now."

"What do you mean?" asked Granny Howe in a strained voice. "And where did you get those clothes?"

"We'll explain it all in a moment," answered Harry. "But just now I think we had better see about your cousin, Mrs. Howe."

"You mean Viney Tucker? What's the matter with her? Who did that awful screaming just now?"

"Mrs. Tucker; and I am afraid she has fallen down a secret passage into the cellar."

"Oh, how terrible!" gasped Arden.

"But what does it all mean?" Sim exclaimed.

"I think," said Harry, "it means the end of the ghosts in the old Hall. Come along, any of you who wish to—if you aren't afraid—but perhaps Dick and I——"

"We'll all come!" declared Granny bravely. "Poor Viney! She wouldn't attend the Christmas party with me. She must have taken a sudden notion and come over by herself—but a secret passage to the cellar—I don't understand!"

"We'll have it all cleared up soon, I think," Harry

said. "There must be an inside way into the cellar, isn't there?"

"I'll show you," offered Granny. "It's at the back of the hall, and there's also one leading out of the old kitchen. The hall way is nearer."

They found Viney Tucker lying in about the same place where Betty had discovered Jim Danton. The grim old lady in the black cloak was faintly moaning. Harry bent over her and made a hasty examination.

"Not badly hurt, I should say," was his verdict. "Just stunned—and very badly frightened."

"What frightened her?" asked Arden.

"I'm afraid we did," Dorothy confessed.

"What in the world possessed you two to sneak off and put on a masquerading act like this?" asked Sim.

"We'll explain everything in a few minutes," answered Harry. "Just now we must get Mrs. Tucker upstairs. Here, Dick, you take this awkward long-tailed coat," and he slipped off the one that had formerly covered a soldier. "I'll carry Mrs. Tucker."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### Falling Stones

PICKING up the old lady in his arms (and now she appeared to be reviving), Harry Pangborn, preceded by Sim and Betty with flashlights gleaming to show the way, started for the stairs. The others followed, Arden and Sim bringing up the rear.

Suddenly from behind them sounded a grating, rumbling noise. They turned in surprise and some fear, just in time to see several stones fall out of the old chimney that was part of the fireplace above. The chimney had its foundation on the bottom of the cellar.

Out toppled the loose stones, falling with a crash that brought nervous screams from Terry and Dorothy.

"What happened?" Harry called back, pausing with his burden.

"Looks as if the old place were falling apart," Dick answered. "The chimney is crumbling. Perhaps we had

too hot a fire on the hearth. I guess we'd better get out of here."

"That chimney will never fall!" declared Granny Howe. "It was built to last forever, and will, unless it's torn down. There is no danger."

Arden paused to flash her light within an opening revealed by the falling stones. It was a smooth recess in the great stone chimney, not a rough aperture such as might happen by accident if some of the stones had merely crumbled away. It was only the few small outer stones, what, virtually, constituted a door to the hidden chamber, that had toppled away revealing a secret place.

And a hiding place it was, as Arden discovered a moment later when her light flashed and gleamed upon a small metal box within.

"Oh, look! Look what I've found!" she cried. "It's a metal chest hidden away."

"Bring it upstairs and we'll have a look!" called Harry.

Arden put her hand in and grasped the box. But it resisted her first effort to wrench it out.

"I'll help you," offered Dick.

Together they pulled, and the box came forth. It was about a foot long, eight inches in width and about

six in depth. It was closed by a heavy brass padlock.

Their first care, on reaching the warm and light room where the Christmas party had come to such a strange end, was to put Viney down on an improvised couch and give her some hot coffee. She had regained her senses, but a great fear and wonder seemed to be upon her.

"Have they—have they gone?" she faltered.

"Who?" asked Granny.

"Those real ghosts—the ghosts I used to be myself."

"Viney, have you been up to ghost tricks here in Sycamore Hall?" Granny's voice was stern.

Viney Tucker looked up, more defiant now. She was rapidly recovering from her fall, which was not so much of a fall as a slide down a smooth wooden chute. It wasn't the ash-chute, but one forming part of a secret passage, as they learned later.

"Yes," Viny confessed, "I was the ghosts. But I'll never be one again. I did it to save the Hall for you, Hannah. I remembered the old stories of Nathaniel Greene and Patience Howe. And when I found you were going to be cheated out of the money you should have had for the sale of this property I decided to stop it from being demolished if I could. So I secretly made

a red cloak, and from a masquerade costumer in a distant city I got the Continental soldier's uniform. I hid them away here in the chest. At times I would slip in here and scare the workmen, by pretending to be either dead Patience on the bed or the tramping soldier, with a red rag around my head and my hat pulled down over my face. It worked, too!" she said, not a little proudly.

"Yes, it worked," admitted Harry. "Especially the screams coming up out of the fireplace. You are a good screamer, Mrs. Tucker."

"I always was," she admitted with a grim smile. "Though I didn't know it was you in the house that day. I thought it was one of the workmen. But I meant no harm. I just wanted to delay the tearing down of this place. I was always hoping the missing papers would be found."

"Well, I think they have been," Arden said. "Let's open the box that I found when the stones fell. I wonder what caused them to fall out and open the hiding place?"

"It might have been the heat, as Dick suggested. We had a pretty hot fire," said Harry. "Though the concussion of Mrs. Tucker's slide down the chute and the vibration caused by something slamming up in the

closet may have done the work. At any rate, let's see what the box holds."

A heavy poker served to break the lock, though Betty said it was a shame to destroy such an antique. But they could not wait to get a locksmith. And when the lid was raised, there, covered with much dust, were a number of legal-appearing documents. Harry glanced hastily through them.

"Well, I think this settles everything," he said. "You won't need the advantage of any long court delay, Mrs. Howe. These deeds, copies of wills, and other papers, will easily prove, I think, your title to this place, and the money paid for it by the Park Commission can now be released to you and your relatives."

"Viney shall have her share!" exclaimed the happy old lady.

"I don't want any, Hannah! I only played ghost for you. I didn't want anything myself."

"You shall have your share, Viney, and so shall Dick and Betty."

"Oh, how wonderful it all is!" Betty murmured.

"Like a story book!" added Dick.

"And to think," said Arden, "that if it hadn't been

for the little prank of Dot and Harry all this would never have been discovered."

"My part as a ghost wouldn't have," said Viney grimly, "for I was planning to keep on scaring those men away if I could. I wasn't going to give up until the Hall was so torn apart I couldn't work my tricks any more. But I didn't know anything about those hidden papers."

"I guess no one did except the foolish man, now long dead, who hid them there," said Granny. "Oh, why didn't he have sense enough to put them in a bank or give them to a lawyer and then we wouldn't have had all this trouble!"

"It wasn't really trouble, Granny!" laughed Sim.

"No, we've had a wonderful time!" agreed Terry.

"I suppose you did play tricks in this ghost masquerade, Mrs. Tucker," Harry said. "But how did you manage to get in and out of the house without being seen—especially when there was snow on the ground."

"I went in and out through a secret tunnel that ends here in an old wine bin and outside in the smoke-house," Mrs. Tucker said with a smile at the girls, who had once surprised her in the place where hams and bacon were cured.

"Oh, so you found the old secret passage, did you, Viney?" asked her cousin. "I never could."

"Well, I did!" Once more Viney smiled. "And I kept it secret. There are two passages," she went on. "One the tunnel and the other the chute I fell down just now."

"That's a part of the mystery I don't yet understand," said Arden. "Why did you come over here tonight? Was it to play a ghost when you knew we were giving Granny a Christmas party?"

"Oh, no, my dear! I'd never do a thing like that, cross and cranky as I know I am. Forgive me—but I've been so worried about Hannah going to lose the inheritance she should have had. I came over here tonight, secretly, as I always come, to save any of you from harm."

"Save us from harm?"

"Yes. I thought some of you might take a notion to roam and wander around the old house. I was afraid you would go in that closet through which a person who knows the trick can slide down the smooth wooden chute to the cellar. I was afraid lest someone might by accident work the spring of the trapdoor and fall. But I was the one who fell.

"You see it's this way. In the old days I suppose it



was often necessary for those who were enemies of the British king to escape in a hurry. So Sycamore Hall, like many another old Colonial mansion, contained secret passages. The one from the wine bin to the smokehouse is quite simple. The other is more complicated. The closet has a false bottom. In it is a trapdoor so well fitted into the floor that one not in the secret would have difficulty in finding it. By pressing on a certain place in the wall, the trapdoor opens, a person can jump or slide down the chute, which is curved in such a way that no harm results from its use. Then the trapdoor closes."

"It didn't close after you slid down tonight," Harry said.

"I realized something was wrong as soon as I pushed the spring," admitted Viney. "Before I had hardly time to get into the chute, the trapdoor closed and struck me a light blow on the head. But it must have sprung open immediately afterward."

"That's probably what happened to Jim Danton," said Arden. "Only he got a severe blow, and the secret trapdoor remained closed."

"Probably did," admitted Viney. "I wasn't there to see, but very likely that man accidentally touched the spring and shot down the chute, getting heavily struck

by the trapdoor as he slid down. The wooden chute really merges into the ash-chute at the lower end, so that's why they thought this Jim fell down the ash-chute. But he didn't—he went down the secret passage out of the closet."

"No wonder it seemed like a real mystical disappearance," said Arden.

"Tonight," went on Viney Tucker, "when I feared some of you would roam about the place, I slipped over here through the tunnel to lock that closet door so you couldn't get in. I heard footsteps up here. I looked out in the hall and saw the two ghosts—ghosts whose parts I had often played myself. I was so frightened that I screamed and ran back in here to hide. I couldn't understand it. Then in my fright I touched the hidden spring and fell down the chute. But the trapdoor, through some defect, closed down on me and then sprang open again. And that ends the mystery. I suppose the tearing down of the Hall can now go on, and the chute and trapdoor will be destroyed with all the other things. Well, I don't care, now that Hannah will get her money."

"There is no further need for ghosts," said Arden.

"Viney, I don't know what to say to you!" exclaimed Granny. Her face was serious but not for

long. She laughed and added: "What will people think when all this comes out?"

"There is no need for it to come out," said Harry. "There is no need for anyone except ourselves knowing that Mrs. Tucker was the ghost. As for the old stories, they will always be told, I suppose—stories of Nathaniel Greene and Patience Howe. But they will gradually die down when the Hall is gone. So there is no reason why Mrs. Tucker need be exposed. We can keep the secret among ourselves."

"I think that would be best," Granny said. "Oh, what a wonderful Christmas this has been!" and again her eyes were suspiciously bright. "Just wonderful! Thank you all, my dear friends. For it was you who brought all this about. Thank you, so much!"

The fire was dying. The simple little gifts had been presented. The candles were spluttering down into the sockets. It was growing cold. The party was over.

Granny gave the precious papers to Harry Pangborn to keep for her. Then, when Granny and her cousin, with Betty and Dick, had departed for the little cottage, over the moonlit snow, just an hour before it would be Christmas, Arden Blake and her friends left the old Hall.

"There's only one thing I'm still puzzled over,"

Arden said as they gathered in Sim's house to quiet down a bit. "Of course, I suppose we all, at different times, suspected different persons of playing the ghost—for we knew that's what the mystery was—some tricky human. But at one time I heard some talk as I was passing some men in the street, which made me think Mr. Ellery might be the guilty one. Mention was made of a man named Nick."

"I think I can explain that," said Harry. "I talked to Dick about it. It seems that there were some rather valuable fittings, like hand-made locks, closet hooks and other things, in the Hall that a contractor would, very likely, save out to sell. Ellery was trying, as the boys say, to double-cross Mr. Callahan and get some of these antiques. Nick was in with him and once or twice tried his game with some cronies. But the ghost scared them away as it did the contractor's honest workmen. So I think it's all cleared up now."

"Another mystery ended," sighed Arden Blake. "I wonder if it will be the last in our lives?"

"I hope not," said Sim.

And Sim's wish came true, as is evidenced in the succeeding volume of this series to be called: *Missing at Marshlands*. That will be another Arden Blake mystery story.

"Well, mystery or no mystery, I think it's time we all went to bed," said Dorothy after much talk.

Harry looked at his watch. He held it up for the girls to see. The hour was past midnight.

"Merry Christmas!" he cried.

"Merry Christmas!" echoed the girls.

Dorothy, with a characteristic mischievous gleam in her eyes, put a bit of the "mistletoe" in her hair. And then, waving her hand at Harry, she ran upstairs.

"I'll catch you sometime!" laughed Harry.

And then, while faintly from the churches came the peal of the Christmas chimes, the girls said good-night to their visitor and to one another.

So was solved the secret of Jockey Hollow.

There was no longer any need for Viney Tucker to play the ghost.

Granny Howe removed such of her last belongings as she wanted to preserve, giving some really valuable antiques to the girls and to Arden the picture of Patience Howe. Harry asked for and was given the old brass box in which were found the papers so long lost.

For the papers in the box Arden Blake's eyes had lighted upon in the chimney hole were the very ones needed to prove Granny Howe's claim to the money.

It was not necessary for the Pangborn lawyers or the Park Commission to engage in any involved proceedings.

The holidays passed all too quickly for Arden and her friends. They went riding several times again, between Christmas and New Year's and in that week work was again started on tearing down the Hall. But no longer did men rush out yelling that they had seen a dead woman on a bed, and no more was heard the tramp of the soldier's boots on the stairs.

All the ghosts had vanished. And with them vanished much of Viney Tucker's queerness. She let the better side of her nature show itself, and now, when Granny had the girls in for tea, Viney joined them.

Arden and her friends had tea with Granny the day before the holiday season ended. She thanked them again and again, for it was through their instrumentality that everything had happened as it did.

"And to think," murmured Dot as they left Granny's little cottage, "that we'll soon be back at Cedar Ridge. Nothing ever happens there!"

"But think of all that did happen!" laughed Arden.

THE END